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Academic and Student Affairs Collaboration to Impact Undergraduate Persistence in the Jesuit
University Context: A Phenomenological Study

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
Requirements for the degree Doctor of Education

by

Emily Schlam

2018

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Academic and Student Affairs Collaboration to Impact Undergraduate Persistence in the Jesuit

University Context: A Phenomenological Study

by

Emily Schlam

Doctor of Education

University of California, Los Angeles, 2018

Professor Robert A. Rhoads, Chair

Higher education is under pressure to improve student success rates. These demands require postsecondary institutions to examine and evolve their practices to create learning environments where all students can succeed. One method to improve institutional persistence rates is to develop collaborations between academic and student affairs. Current evidence indicates that these partnerships are essential to improving student success, but can be difficult to cultivate. As the landscape of higher education is not monolithic, exclusively examining Jesuit universities provides valuable insight due to their unique organizational context. Therefore, this dissertation examined the phenomenon of collaboration through the experiences of 22 academic and student affairs officers involved in these partnerships to help answer a fundamental question. How are successful intra-organizational partnerships between academic and student affairs, focused on undergraduate persistence, developed, implemented, and sustained at Jesuit universities?

Using phenomenological methodology and organizational theory frameworks, this study used semi-structured interviews and document analysis to explore how student and academic

affairs officers understand and experience cross-functional collaborations focused on undergraduate student persistence in the Jesuit university setting. Employing organizational theory frameworks of culture, structure, and open systems, I examined the factors that support or undermine collaboration's success, and how these collaborations overcome barriers to sustainability. Furthermore, I explored how academic and student affairs officers evaluate the success of their collaborations and how the Jesuit mission relates to distinctive approaches to creating collaborations.

From the data collected, it became evident that participants perceived cross-divisional collaboration as a critical component to student success strategies, and crucial to realizing significant improvements in metrics like student persistence. However, on the campuses studied, organizational factors (i.e., resourcing, leadership support, institutional transitions, mission, academic/administrative cultures), individual factors (i.e., fostering trust and respect of expertise, collaborative competencies, ability to dialogue), and external factors (i.e., changes to student demographics, compliance, selection of board members) coalesce to produce an environment that can both support and undermine the sustainability of these essential partnerships. Collaborative structures, processes, and methods of evaluating student persistence partnerships varied across the campuses, however, there was a pronounced trend regarding their common purpose, which focuses on whole- student success grounded in the charisms of the Jesuit mission. The overwhelming commitment, alignment, and infusion of the Jesuit mission into daily practices was the most profound and prominent finding of this study.

This dissertation offers several recommendations for practitioners at Jesuit universities, as well as, educators from other types of postsecondary institutions desiring insight on developing successful cross-divisional collaborations for student persistence. Implications for educational practice and recommendations for educational leadership are also addressed.

The dissertation of Emily Schlam is approved.

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2018

DEDICATION

To my collaborator in life and love, my husband, Saul. None of this would be possible without you by my side. Thank you for being my partner on this adventure, and all the adventures to come.

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Last but not least, thank you to my husband, Saul. What a wild ride this has been! I love you for all that you are, all that we are together, and all that we will become.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

“An institution’s commitment to student success is directly proportional to the number of collaborative links between the administrators and the faculty.”

-Miller & Prince, 1976, p. 155

Higher education is under scrutiny from stakeholders and the public to improve student success rates (Ruffalo Noel Levitz, 2017; U.S Department of Education, 2015; Zumeta, 2000). Although the greatest pressure may be brought to bear on public sector higher education, nonetheless private colleges and universities (including Jesuit universities—the focus of this proposed study) face similar sorts of pressures. These demands require postsecondary institutions to evolve their practices to create learning environments where all students can succeed. One method is to develop campus-wide academic and student affairs collaborations that establish curricular and co-curricular approaches (Kellogg, 1999; Kinzie & Kuh, 2004). Current evidence indicates that these partnerships are essential to student success, but are difficult to cultivate and sustain due to longstanding cultural and structural barriers along with differences in roles and responsibilities (American Association for Higher Education, American College Personnel Association, & National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, 1998; Bergquist & Pawlak, 2008; Borland, 2003; Bourassa & Kruger, 2001; Del Favero & Bray, 2005; Holton & Phillips, 1995; Kezar, 2005b; Kinzie & Kuh, 2004; Skaggs, 2016; Streit, Dalton, & Crosby, 2009).

Sparse empirical evidence exists on the factors that enable successful development of academic and student affairs collaborations within different educational settings (The Boyer Commission on Educating Undergraduates in the Research University, 1998; Kezar, 2001a, 2003b; Martin & Murphy, 2000; Whitt, Nesheim, Guentzel, Kellogg, McDonald, & Wells, 2008). Empirical research on the success of such partnerships is still in its infancy and mainly focused

on student affairs perspectives (J. Cook & Lewis, 2007; Kellogg, 1999; O'Halloran, 2005).

Accordingly, research on higher education collaboration needs to focus on this fundamental question: How are successful intra-organizational partnerships between academic and student affairs, focused on undergraduate persistence, developed, implemented, and sustained?

Need for Particularized Study of U.S. Jesuit Colleges and Universities

Research is clearly needed on successful collaborative experiences between academic and student affairs; additionally, such research needs to focus on student retention at specific institutional settings, given the diversity of institutional type and mission in higher education. It is important to note that the landscape of higher education in the U.S. is not monolithic. There are more than 4,000 degree-granting institutions (4-year and 2-year) in the U.S. (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017), all revealing similarities as well as enormous differences when it comes to institutional setting and organizational dynamics (Birnbaum, 1988). One institutional setting warranting a more focused analysis is that of the Jesuit university. Accordingly, in this study, the institutional setting is limited to Jesuit colleges and universities in the U.S. due to their unique organizational context. For this study, organizational context refers to major organizational dynamics including: structural, process, human, political, and cultural elements of the campus (Kezar & Lester, 2009). Examples of these types of organizational dynamics may include institutional policies and practices, cultural identity and educational mission, leadership and decision-making systems, climate, membership values, and affiliations.

There are 28 Jesuit colleges and universities in the United States. Jesuit institutions have a distinctive context as they are religiously affiliated with the Society of Jesus and the Catholic Church; however, each of the 28 institutions is chartered by their respective state, and they are legally autonomous and under the control of their board of trustees. Therefore, unlike other Catholic colleges, Jesuit colleges and universities tend to have more autonomy in making

decisions concerning institutional policies and practices. Unlike some Catholic colleges and universities, faculty and staff do not sign fidelity pledges (Vatican's Oath of Fidelity).

Additionally, 40 percent of the presidents of Jesuit institutions are lay, and many faculty and staff do not identify as Catholic (Feldner, 2006). In regard to enrolling students' religious affiliation, at a majority of the schools, only between a third and two-thirds of students identify as Catholic (AJCU, 2016). However, the 28 schools are bonded together by a common heritage, vision, and mission of education that is deeply rooted in Jesuit and Catholic ideologies, cultural norms, charisms, and practices. As established in previous research by scholars such Duminuco (2000), Korth (2008), and Metts (1991), Jesuit universities have strong connections to the Ignatian mission, which underlines undergraduate student development of the whole person, through teaching and learning environments focused on critical inquiry, scholarship, and service. As Korth (2008) stated:

Ignatian teaching and learning pedagogy strives to develop men and women of competence, conscience, and compassion. This teaching model is a collaborative process between faculty, campus members, and students which fosters personal and cooperative study, discovery, creativity, evaluation, and reflection to promote life-long learning and action in service to others. (p. 280)

Nearly all U.S. colleges and universities, especially liberal arts colleges, espouse a tripartite mission of teaching and learning, scholarship, and service; however, the Jesuit educational mission is unique, as it has deep spiritual and religious connections. As such, the mission of Jesuit higher education accords a special place to the mind, body, and spirit of the student, placing the "education of the whole person" at the center of its efforts (Kolvenbach, 2001, p. 10). Based on these exclusive qualities of institutional context and educational priorities, educational researchers describe Jesuit institutions as a distinct educational category of schools unto themselves (LaBelle & Kendall, 2016).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to add to knowledge about collaborations among academic and student affairs within the Jesuit higher education context, and for a focused institutional goal of undergraduate persistence to degree completion. This project attempts to address the gap in the research by conducting empirical analyses of conditions that influence the development, implementation, and sustainability of existing collaborations between academic and student affairs at Jesuit universities (all of whom remain anonymous throughout my writing). Among the issues still not understood is how academic and student affairs stakeholders experience the processes of collaboration around student retention initiatives, which I address by researching how these participants make meaning in creating collaborative initiatives. As mentioned previously, Jesuit colleges and universities provide a strong environment in which to study collaborations for student success based on their distinct institutional mission, which emphasizes a dedication to teaching, mentoring, service, and whole-student development grounded in historical significance and religious beliefs (AJCU, 2016; Feldner, 2006; O'Malley, 2015; Peck & Stick, 2008).

Higher education research shows that one of the foremost challenges in developing, implementing, and sustaining collaborative practices lies in the inability to overcome longstanding cultural and structural barriers between academic and student affairs that can hinder collaborative initiatives (Kezar & Lester, 2009). These obstacles must be understood and navigated by organizational actors in order to create successful partnerships. Given these barriers, research that provides a more comprehensive narrative on the collaborative phenomenon through the lived experiences of organizations' members is imperative to understanding how collaborations focused on student persistence are achieved at U.S. Jesuit colleges and universities.

Operational Definitions for the Study

Two key terms are essential to define and operationalize in the context of this problem and developed study: *student success* and *collaboration*. Generally, in higher education literature, the term student success encompasses elements of growth, development, and achievement through academics and engagement in purposeful activities, satisfaction, acquisition of knowledge, skills, and competences, persistence, and attainment of educational goals (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2005; Seidman, 2005). Terenzini (as cited in Polnariev & Levy, 2016) acknowledged that in the current higher education landscape, there additional forms of student success metrics above those of academic benchmarks, including “various forms of psycho-social development, enhanced moral reasoning, attitudes and value formation, educational attainment, economic and occupational rewards, and quality of life” (Polnariev & Levy, 2016, p. 3). For this study, the term student success is used to describe all elements of student success outlined previously as they relate to students’ ability to retain and persist to graduation in the same higher education institution.

Similarly, collaboration has been defined in many variations of higher education research. B. Gray (1989) defined collaboration as a process through which parties who have different perspectives of a problem can explore their differences constructively. Together, they can develop solutions that go beyond their own limited knowledge and vision. Rhoads (1997) defined collaboration as a reciprocal work process between professionals that involves a joint development of goals. Clayton-Pederson and Dungy (2007) added the importance of a focus on mutually desirable outcomes and a commitment to a common vision or mission. For this study, collaboration will be defined as a joint effort where two or more different groups with varying perspectives or functions work in a reciprocal partnership towards a common vision, mission, or goal(s), with the outcome being mutually beneficial (Clayton-Pederson & Dungy, 2007; B. Gray,

1989; Rhoads, 1997). This study exclusively examined collaborations between academic and student affairs focused on undergraduate persistence. Additional terms for this study are defined as follows:

- **Retention/Persistence:** Retaining student enrollment from semester to semester while maintaining degree attainment within 4-6 years of entering cohort group (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). Retention and persistence are generally used interchangeably in scholarly work (Hagedorn, 2005). However, most institutional data for internal or external reporting on retention focuses on first-time, degree-seeking undergraduate students' first to second-year retention of entering fall cohorts. Persistence attributes continued enrollment to degree completion (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2016).
- **Mission:** The formally articulated overarching and long-term purpose of the institution that represents what an institution is and aspires to be. Every campus has a mission statement that communicates the goals, outcomes, and values of the organization (Kezar & Kinzie, 2006). Kuh et al. (2005) noted: "the mission establishes the tone of a college and conveys its educational purposes, whether based on religious, ideological, or educational beliefs, giving direction to all aspects of institutional life, including policies and practices that foster student success" (p. 25).
- **Academic Affairs Administrators:** Refers to personnel working in academic units that report directly or indirectly to the chief academic officer. Generally, this includes a combination of faculty and academic administrators in different functional areas focused on curricular initiatives.
- **Student Affairs Administrators:** Refers to personnel in college units that are primarily responsible for student development and support outside the classroom. Student

affairs administrators generally report to a chief student affairs officer, and monitor functional areas that involve enrollment management, student development, first-year programming, advising and counseling, residential life, co-curricular activities, and students' personal and emotional wellbeing, among other areas (Winston, Creamer, & Miller, 2013).

- Ignatian spirituality (also known as Jesuit spirituality): A type of Catholic ideology founded on the experiences of the 16th-century theologian Ignatius of Loyola. Ignatian Jesuit spirituality strives to articulate the intelligibility of the Christian faith with the assistance and insights of the different fields of human knowledge. Ignatian spirituality is the cornerstone of the Jesuit charism underlying all Jesuit institutions, including universities (O'Malley, 2015).
- Ignatian pedagogy: Jesuit education follows an Ignatian pedagogy that includes five key elements: context, experience, reflection, action, and evaluation. Jesuit education supports a lifelong commitment to being open to growth, intellectual competence, faithfulness, love, and justice (AJCU, 2016).

The Problem

Retaining students through degree completion is a measure of university success (Voigt & Hundrieser, 2008). American higher education institutions are concerned about student attrition and seek sustainable interventions to improve retention (Seidman, 2005). Of all students who started college in fall 2014, 72 percent persisted at any U.S. institution in fall 2015, whereas 60.6 percent were retained at their starting institution. For students who started college in 4-year private nonprofit institutions, the persistence rate is decreasing. Currently at 86.7 percent, rates are down 0.5 percentage points from the prior year, and down 0.6 percentage points in comparison to the fall 2009 cohort. Of all students who started college in this sector in fall 2014,

75.5 percent returned to the same institution. For students whose entering status was part-time, the persistence rate was 60.4 percent, down 1.2 percentage points from the prior year, and down 3.2 percentage points in comparison to the fall 2009 cohort. (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2016).

In regard to degree attainment outcomes, the 6-year graduation rate for first-time, full-time undergraduate students who began seeking a bachelor's degree at a 4-year degree-granting university, 59 percent had completed a bachelor's degree by 2015 at the same institution where they started in 2009. The average 6-year graduation rate at private nonprofit institutions was 66 percent (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2015). These statistics demonstrate that retention and persistence to degree completion are not as strong as they could be, and therefore, methods to improve these rates should be investigated further. One means to achieve such improvements was articulated in the American College Testing's (2010) retention report, which collected data from 440 U.S. private 4-year college and universities. This report determined that an important factor for influencing persistence issues was implementing a campus-wide team composed of academic and non-academic members to partner in the development and execution of persistence initiatives.

Arguably, the challenge for higher education institutions is fostering an environment that can nurture cross-functional partnerships, even though the cultural and structural elements necessary for successfully institutionalized collaboration are not inherently present (Kezar & Lester, 2009). Holton and Phillips (1995) noted that construction of partnerships in higher education is difficult due to the longstanding separation of academic and student affairs roles and functions. Separations resulted in the development of different functional and managerial cultures, causing barriers to emerge between functional partnerships (Bergquist & Pawlak, 2008; Borland, 2003; Miller, Williams, & Garavalia, 2003; Skaggs, 2016). The silo effect in roles and

functions affects students' ability to have seamless learning environments (Schroeder, 1999), which may result in reduced student satisfaction and retention (The Boyer Commission on Educating Undergraduates in the Research University, 1998; Del Rey & Romero, 2004; Van Vaught, 2008; Voigt & Hundrieser, 2008). However, research has shown that institutions that can develop congruence between their institutional practices and missions tend to have increased student success and engagement (Kezar & Kinzie, 2006; Kuh et al., 2011).

In general, religiously affiliated institutions report strong connections to their missions (Feldner, 2006; Graham, Ribera, BrckaLorenz, & Broderick 2017; Lowery, 2012; Markland, 2009; Weiss, 2009), and, in theory, it is expected that the mission will be considered when making institutional decisions and executing daily work (Firmin & Gilson, 2010). As mentioned previously, Jesuit educational institutions have a mission to provide support to students both in and out of the classroom to meet their academic goals and obtain degree completion, with faculty and student affairs collaboration being one of the means to achieve this goal. Furthermore, the Jesuit mission not only provides a vision for the kind of education these schools offer, but also elaborates on the ways to achieve these values in practice through pedagogy, educational offerings, and most importantly for this study, collaborative practices (Stringer & Swezey, 2006). For example, many Jesuit mission statements state that collaborative practices between Jesuit and lay colleagues, academic and student affairs, campus and community, and across disciplines foster genuine dialogue, as well as a shared sense of mission and opportunities, all of which strengthen organizational culture and institutional effectiveness. However, even with a mission that prioritizes whole-person teaching and learning through collaboration, Jesuit institutions maintain hierarchical and religious organizational infrastructures and must manage unique external pressures from stakeholders that could hamper partnerships between academic and student affairs. Therefore, Jesuit institutions provide a venue for investigating how members

have overcome these boundaries and barriers to successfully implement collaborative practices (Feldner, 2006). Further, and in light of their unique educational mission and context, research on Jesuit institutions is needed to help such colleges and universities improve undergraduate education in general and student retention in particular. Due to this identified gap in current research, this study seeks to explore the experiences of academic and student affairs officers at Jesuit institutions who are actively participating in collaborations to impact student persistence. It is the goal of this study to produce findings that may provide insights to better understand the development, implementation, and sustainability of their collaborative practices through the following research questions.

Research Questions

To examine collaborations aimed at improving undergraduate retention at Jesuit higher education institutions in the U.S., I posed the following overarching research question: How do academic and student affairs officers at Jesuit colleges and universities define successful intra-organizational collaborations in support of student persistence and how are such collaborations different from other campus collaborations?

- a. To what extent do cultural norms and the ways in which the institution is organized factor into the success of these collaborations?
- b. How do such institutions' members evaluate success of collaborative retention efforts?
- c. How, if at all, does the institution's Jesuit mission relate to distinctive approaches for creating collaboration?

Study Design and Rationale for Phenomenological Qualitative Methodology

This study's conceptual framework is deeply rooted in phenomenological research, as this research examined lived experiences and meaning making of academic and student affairs

officers regarding the phenomenon of collaboration. Phenomenology is a qualitative research approach that seeks to make explicit the implicit structure and meaning of human experiences through an analysis of consciousness (Atkinson, 1972; Sanders, 1982). In words of phenomenological researcher Van Manen (2016), “phenomenology is the systematic attempt to uncover and describe the internal meaning structures of lived experiences as we live them” (p. 10).

Theoretical framework. The use of phenomenological approaches in organizational research is well documented; phenomenology is an appropriate method for understanding complex organizational problems by distilling elements of the phenomena through the lived experiences of participants (Downey & Ireland, 1979; Miles, 1979; Morgan & Smircich, 1980; Sanders, 1982; Van Maanen, 1979). Therefore, the complementary theoretical framework for this study drew from different areas of organizational theory scholarship. A primary concept undergirding this study is that internal and external dynamics of higher education institutions heavily influence the development, implementation, and sustainability of retention-focused academic and student affairs collaborations. Based on this assumption, three frameworks are used to contextualize this study based on organizational theory. Organizational culture is used as a lens to examine how institutional values, assumptions, mission, subcultures, and norms support or hinder collaborative practices. A structural framework is employed to explain the complexities of colleges and universities’ functional dynamics by exploring the idea of educational organizations as loosely coupled systems. Finally, the concept of open systems is used as a framework to view the external pressures that influence the creation of daily practices and processes in higher education. For this study, particular external pressures include scrutiny from stakeholders regarding low student persistence rates; accountability measurements for accreditation and rankings from federal, state, and private agencies; and religious-affiliated

priorities from the Catholic Church or Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities (AJCU) affiliations. Additionally, empirical and anecdotal findings from the literature on collaboration in higher education and student success support the study's framework and rationale.

Study site and population. I collected data at six 4-year Jesuit colleges and universities from across the country for three key reasons. First, Jesuit institutions are unique to such an extent that studies of their particularized context are needed to facilitate their organizational development. Secondly, Jesuit institutions have felt increasing pressures to maintain or increase retention and persistence initiatives in the last few years, especially in terms of serving traditionally underrepresented student populations such as racial and ethnic minorities, as well as first generation, transfer, and non-traditional students (Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities [AJCU], 2016; National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). Finally, I selected this context due to my professional linkages and responsibilities to such institutions as a practitioner. Based on my professional linkages, I have access to the individuals necessary to conduct my study. The six sites for the study were selected out of the viable campuses based on criteria of being master's degree awarding, actively participating in academic and student affairs collaborations focused on undergraduate persistence, and access to interview participants.

Individual interviews were conducted with 22 academic affairs and student affairs officers across the selected six sites. Three to five interviews were conducted at each site with at least one member of each functional group. Selective and purposeful sampling of interviewees was employed in accord with the aims of the study (Schatzman & Strauss, 1973), with participant recruitment focused on individuals who collaborate on, or have knowledge of, persistence initiatives. All interview data were kept confidential, with participants and selected sites remaining anonymous throughout my study.

Significance of the Study

The American College Personnel Association, American Association for Higher Education, National Association for Student Affairs Professionals, and Educational Resources Information Clearinghouse on Higher Education listed “Collaboration and Partnerships” across institutional divisions as a necessary trend for institutional progress and a critical area for additional research to be conducted (American Association for Higher Education [AAHE] et al., 1998, p. 5). In light of this call to action, this study—with slight modifications—could be replicated at any institution to provide a broad audience of educational leaders with insight and relevant data into methods for developing and implementing cross-campus partnerships targeted at impacting student retention. The basic argument justifying a study of Jesuit institutions is linked to the reality that such colleges and universities have distinct missions and educational context and necessarily will directly benefit from studies of them. Therefore, this study’s findings will be disseminated through the AJCU research-sharing channels, to assist with the AJCU’s goal of increasing information on successful retention and persistence collaborations at Jesuit colleges and universities. The information will be especially useful to AJCUs, as undergraduate retention is currently a topic of high importance.

Chapter II provides a review of relevant literature on academic and student affairs collaboration. It also includes a discussion of the organizational and cultural barriers that hinder collaborative practices between these groups. A specific focus is placed on literature that addresses the Jesuit mission and its impact on developing collaborative practices for undergraduate retention. The chapter concludes with the study’s theoretical approach.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

“People collaborate when the job they face is too big, is too urgent, or requires too much knowledge for one person or group to do alone.”

-American Association for Higher Education et al., 1998, p.1

Collaboration requires that disparate stakeholders come together with unique skill sets, perspectives, and knowledge to solve institutional problems (Wood & Gray, 1991). The power of collaboration is that it creates a shared mission, fosters community building, and breaks down silos to create a free exchange of ideas, information, and skills. Formalized academic and student affairs collaborations¹ are increasingly prominent in higher education and have been identified by researchers and practitioners as an important strategy to increase student success (ACPA, 1999; Haugabrook, 2001; Tinto, 2004; J. Cook & Lewis, 2007; Cho & Sriram, 2016; NASPA, 1997). By leveraging the benefits of collaboration, universities and colleges are better able to meet the challenges of the changing 21st century university.

Jesuit colleges and universities are especially affected by current shifts in higher education as they seek to serve a diverse student body, and as such, they seek to exemplify their values in operational practices. However, like most institutions, they are concerned with student retention and persistence to degree completion and are seeking out innovative practices to improve student success. In the private college environment, there is increased public scrutiny around cost and student achievement. Initiatives to promote and increase student achievement are even more critical to the overall health and success of the university or college. Literature shows that academic and student affairs partnerships increase student integration and engagement within the college community (Love & Love; 1995; Kezar, 2003b; Kuh, 1996;

¹ Previous studies identify the two functional areas that should collaborate for student success initiatives as: academic affairs (faculty, academic affairs staff, chief academic affairs officers, deans, provosts) and student affairs (chief student affairs officers and other types of student support services staff).

Polnariev, Levy, & McGowan, 2010). Given that students are more likely to be successful when academic affairs and student affairs staff collaborate, more research is needed to understand how to support collaboration between these areas (Kinzie & Kuh, 2004; Kuh, 2005; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2011; Polnariev & Levy, 2016; Seidman, 2012).

My study sought to understand stakeholders' perceptions of factors that promote, support, or undermine successful collaborations directed at increasing student retention. In order to understand this problem, this literature review is divided into three sections pertaining to academic and student affairs collaborations: (a) impact of these collaborations, (b) implementation variables for developing these collaborations, and (c) theoretical perspectives helpful in understanding these collaborations. In the first section, I synthesize current research on established collaborations and their impacts on students, stakeholders, and institutions. Because research indicates that collaborative impact is limited due to institutional dynamics, in the second section, I investigate implementation by discussing potential barriers to collaboration, citing conditions for fostering a campus culture of collaboration, developmental models of collaboration, and current models to improve student retention. As mission affects implementation, I explore characteristics of mission-oriented environments, in particular, Jesuit and Ignatian universities. The third section grounds the study and provides theoretical lenses to best understand collaboration through three organizational concepts: culture, structure, and open systems. Understanding the internal and external organizational dynamics that influence educational institutions equips us to understand existing constraints for collaboration while enabling an examination of how actions and goals are most likely to succeed and how they can be implemented (Tierney, 1988).

Section I: Impact of Academic and Student Affairs Collaborations

According to the Georgetown Center on Education and the Workforce (2016), 65 percent of U.S. jobs will require some form of postsecondary education by 2020. Additionally, with inflating tuitions, institutions are under scrutiny from students and stakeholders to retain students to degree completion. With an increasing need for post-secondary degree attainment, scholars and practitioners recognize that innovative academic and student affairs collaborations are an “absolute necessity” to improve student outcomes (Schroeder et al., as cited in J. Cook & Lewis, 2007, p. 34).

Reason for engaging in collaborations. One of the greatest imperatives faced by colleges and universities is the need to increase student success while managing declining resources and a continually evolving complexity of student needs. This requires both systemic change and significant ongoing investment to better utilize current resources to improve student performance (Castleman, Schwartz, & Baum, 2015; Polnariev & Levy, 2016). The U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Postsecondary Education (2012) emphasized that “student success can only be attained through integrated and sustained strategies and program that are part of institutional culture” (p. 25). However, as research shows, regardless of how well intentioned a particular student success initiative, if it operates in isolation, the likelihood of that program having significant and sustained positive outcomes is reduced (Kezar, 2003a; Kezar & Lester, 2009; Polnariev & Levy, 2016). More specifically, collaborations between academic and student affairs have been shown to enhance student learning, increase student retention and persistence, strengthen a sense of campus community, improve institutional effectiveness, and develop interpersonal relationships between academic and student affairs (Kezar, 200b Kezar & Lester, 2009; Kuh, 1996; O’Halloran, 2005; Nesheim et al., 2007).

The primary goal of collaboration between academic and student affairs is to integrate the academic, experiential, and practical learning of students so as to retain them through degree completion (Frost, Strom, Downey, Schultz, & Holland, 2010; Perez, 2016). The most common examples of collaboration include: academic support initiatives focused on student learning (i.e., curriculum design, academic assessments, academic advising, course registration, curricular programming such as first year seminars), co-curricular initiatives focused on student engagement and development (i.e., residential life, living-learning communities, orientation, career planning, and university skills courses, and orientation), service-learning programming (i.e., external partnerships focused on volunteer work), and policy and planning activities (i.e., task force groups and university committees; Bourassa & Kruger, 2001; Engstrom & Tinto, 2000; Hargrave, 2000; Kezar & Lester, 2009; O'Halloran, 2005; Martin & Murphy, 2000). These types of academic and student affairs collaborations occur in some form at 75 percent of U.S. campuses (O'Halloran, 2005).

Empirical studies show correlations between academic and student affairs collaborations and increased student success. Looking at student engagement and success, Kuh et al. (2005) evaluated National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) data for institutions with high levels of collaborative practices and concluded that academic and student affairs partnerships enhanced student learning outcomes, increased student engagement, and affected college persistence. Students felt they were more likely to persist when support came from multiple offices and/or departments throughout campus, especially when their staff members were working together. For instance, one campus in Kuh et al.'s study evaluated collaboration among classroom instructors, academic advisers, residence hall staff, and wellness center personnel as they developed an early warning system that identified students who struggled academically, emotionally, or socially. Academic and student affairs personnel then made assessments about

the most appropriate method to intervene without redundancy and shared strategies of how best to work with struggling students. Additionally, Nesheim et al. (2007) conducted a qualitative study of learning outcomes associated with academic and student affairs partnerships. They provide empirical evidence that partnership programs between these units enhanced student outcomes such as “acclimation to the institution, engagement, learning, and academic and career decisions” (p. 450).

Research shows that students’ academic and cognitive development occur both outside and inside the classroom. Wilson (1966) projected that 70 percent of student learning emerges from experiences outside of the classroom. This research provides an important rationale for why cross-functional collaborations (and the individual roles of both academic and student affairs) are important for student learning and success. For example, Terenzini, Springer, Pascarella, and Nora (1995a) found evidence that “students’ academic and nonacademic experiences both separately and jointly shape student learning” (p. 40). They found that critical thinking, intellectual curiosity, and interest in learning result from out-of-classroom experiences at similar levels as to the classroom academic experience, which is often characterized as the sole setting where cognitive development is cultivated (Kuh, 1993; Terenzini, Springer, Pascarella, & Nora, 1995b). A literature review of studies examining the effects of the out-of-class experience on cognitive development and learning reveals that these experiences are “far more influential in students’ academic and intellectual development than many faculty members and academic and student affairs administrators think” (Terenzini, Pascarella, & Blimling, 1996, p. 157).

Perhaps the most important advantage to collaboration is that it creates innovation and learning across organizations (Morgan, 2006; Senge, 1990). Organizations that have both horizontal and vertical linkages between members allows for increased interactions, information sharing, communication, and collective problem solving (Kezar & Lester, 2009). As Mohrman,

Cohen, and Mohrman (1995) noted, “innovation occurs when different perspectives and knowledge bases are joined, resulting in the reframing of problems and solutions that would not have been likely or possible from within one perspective” (p. 8). Additionally, collaborations can ensure that the needed expertise to problem solve an issue is available and addressed. Varying perspectives helps increase the cognitive complexity of problem solving, effectiveness, and overall institutional innovation. In general, campus environments are changing, becoming home to more diverse students, technology, accountability, and resource demands, and new skills needed for student success. However, organizational processes and practices have not generally evolved. Researchers suggest that this inability to innovate could be compromising higher education’s effectiveness and quality (J. Cook & Lewis, 2007; Kezar & Lester, 2009; Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2011; Polnariev & Levy, 2016; Tierney, 1998).

Even with evidence for the benefits of academic and student affairs collaborations for student learning, engagement, and success, some perspectives see disadvantages of collaboration. It is important to take these views into consideration when investigating the phenomenon of collaboration. For example, Magolda (2005) cautioned institutions about creating collaborations just for the sake of attempting to be more cross-functional, but not taking the time to align collaborative practices with purpose or shared vision. “Faculty, students, and administrators jump on the bandwagon and begin their journey, because it is fashionable and sounds right, often without purposefully and carefully considering whether a particular partnership has merit” (p. 17). Further, Whitt (2011) noted that those in academia view these collaborations as the appropriate response to help facilitate student success without considering other options by stating, “One could argue that they have become an all-purpose response to a wide variety of campus issues and student concerns, making collaborations, an end rather than a means” (p. 484). Both Magolda and Whitt suggested that the growing focus on academic and student

affairs collaborations should not be a cure-all to student concerns; however, if done correctly, it can act as a systematic process that facilitates cross-functional options to support seamless learning environments.

Although collaborations are fairly prevalent on campuses, the literature shows that there are issues with partnership sustainability. Some research points to misalignment between types of collaboration created and stated reasons for execution (Magolda, 2005). For example, by surveying 365 Chief Student Affairs Officers, O'Halloran (2005) identified that the most frequent student and academic affairs collaborations implemented were for policy and systems issues and institutional effectiveness. However, the most common reasons stated were for direct student learning, community building, strengthening interpersonal relationships, and increasing student retention. Additionally, research supports the notion that implementation reasons for academic-student affairs collaborations vary based on institutional type (Kuh et al., 2011; Kezar & Lester, 2009; O'Halloran, 2005). Private institutions are more likely to cite learning and student retention as implementation factors. Community colleges and public 4-year institutions are more inclined to state that leadership or institutional philosophies motivate implementation of collaborations (Kezar, 2001a, 2003b; O'Halloran, 2005).

Empirical research on what conditions are needed to implement and sustain successful collaborations is sparse. However, the aforementioned findings stress the importance of creating a collaborative campus culture (Kezar, 2001a), alignment between collaboration and institutional goals (Kezar & Lester, 2009), support from leadership (J. Cook & Lewis, 2007), and space to allow collaborations to develop (Perez, 2016).

Improving educational outcomes through collaborations. Formalized academic and student affairs collaborations are a relatively new concept in higher education. Up until the later 20th century, there seemed to be little to no interest in partnerships between academic affairs and

student affairs, as prior to that time student affairs were seen as an enhancement of or support to academic affairs through coordination but not collaboration (Hamrick, Evans, & Schuh, 2002). It was not until the late 20th century that interest in collaboration between academic and student affairs functional areas increased due to the increased accountability structures, limited resources, and increasingly complex student curricular and non-curricular needs. These challenges prompted a national dialogue by higher education professional organizations about the need to develop and support collaborative initiatives between academic and student affairs for increased efficiency and improved student outcomes (AAHE et al., 1998; Holcombe et al., 2016). From 1990-2001, national higher education organizations such as the American College Personnel Association, National Academic Advising Association, and National Association of Student Personnel Administrators focused on cross-functional collaborations as a necessary area for further research.

Several documents are credited with starting a dialogue about how universities could engage in more comprehensive collaborations for student success (American College Personnel Association [ACPA], 1994; AAHE et al., 1998; Keeling, 2004; National Association of Student Personnel Administrators [NASPA], 1997). These reports² identified academic and student affairs partnerships as a high-impact practice to improve student learning, increase student retention, and enhance the holistic college experience for students (J. Cook & Lewis, 2007; Keeling, 2004; Kezar & Lester, 2009). Report findings emphasized that significant progress toward improving student learning and success will only be made once academic and student affairs share the responsibility and vision for improving outcomes. Most importantly, these

² *The Student Learning Imperative* (ACPA, 1994), *Principles of Good Practice* (NASPA, 1997), *Powerful Partnerships: A Shared Responsibility for Learning* (AAHE et al., 1998), and *Learning Reconsidered: A Campus-Wide Focus on the Student Experience* (Keeling, 2004)

documents called for all higher education's stakeholders to realign campus practices to support students' learning and development. Documents from annual student and academic affairs conferences³ from the 1990s to 2017 reveal that professional attention to partnership programs for student success has increased. However, even with this increased interest in collaborations as a nationally recognized method to improve student success, empirical research outlining how institutions can develop, implement, and sustain collaborations that affect student retention is still sparse.

Academic and student affairs collaborations can be an innovative and effective method to improve outcomes for student and institutions more generally. Although successful partnerships can create great improvements, over 50 percent of attempted collaborations fail to be sustainable due to weak or fragmented organizational culture (Etzioni, 1964; Kezar & Lester, 2009); ill-constructed organizational systems (Birnbaum, 1988; Clark, 1983; Weick, 1976); misalignment of institutional mission (Bolman & Deal, 2010; Kezar & Kinzie; Schein, 2010), lack of collaborative vision, strategic relationships, and leadership (Kezar, 2005a; Kezar & Lester, 2009; Swenk, 1999); minimal attention to measurement or assessment of cooperative projects leading to issues with accountability (Angelo, 1999; Gannon-Slater, Ikenberry, Jankowski, & Kuh, 2014; Schroeder, 1999); or no intentional design or structures to support collaborations (Doz, 1996; Perez, 2016). With these factors in mind, I move on to review current literature on implementation factors to develop collaborations as well as the cultural and structural barriers hindering collaborations.

³ The Association of American Colleges and Universities' (2017) Institute on Collaborations as High-Impact Practices and Student Success, NASPA (2017) workshop: "Tackling Big Challenges for Big Results with Student Affairs & Academic Affairs Partnerships."

Section II: Implementation Factors for Developing Collaborations

Institutions have struggled to produce successful collaborations due to barriers that are preventing partnerships from being developed, implemented, and sustained. These barriers are not new to post-secondary institutions; there is a long-standing history of organizational fragmentation through increased specialization of roles, mistrust, and widening gaps in cultural and functional norms between academic and student affairs (Beodeker, 2006; Kellogg, 1999; Thelin, 2011; Rudy & Brubacher, 1976).

Barriers to collaboration. Generally speaking, collaborations are a powerful way to improve student success. However, as Blimling and Whitt (1999) note:

Collaboration does not come easily or naturally owing to the personalities, history, expertise, and territories that define colleges and universities. What is more remarkable is that collaboration does occur. What makes it possible is a common desire to do good for students. Few serve in a university who do not care about students. (p. 18)

When investigating the barriers to collaboration, one must examine how the organization is configured through two theoretical perspectives: structural and cultural (Birnbaum, 1991; Clark, 1972, 1984; Toma, 2010). The structural view considers how an organization is formally constructed and its method for operating through tangible elements such as functional, positional, operational or divisional configuration of units, reporting hierarchy, governance, financial allocations, systems, and organizational policies and procedures. The cultural view concentrates on the behavioral, informal, and interpersonal components of the organization. Cultural perspectives focus on how people interpret events and perform daily functions as well as how the organizational setting and the values or beliefs influence their roles (Peterson, 1985; Peterson & Spencer, 1990). Institutional structure and culture are inherently interconnected in organizations, and their complexities are factors in the success or failure of institutional change for collaborative practices.

Arguably, higher education is an isomorphic and homogeneous organization both culturally and structurally (Birnbaum, 1988; DiMaggio & Powell, 1991). Specifically, academic and student affairs units and/or divisions function as two distinct systems, but have frequent professional interactions (Kezar & Lester, 2009; Kuo, 2009). Cultural differences include: professional subculture norms (i.e., work style and institutional outlook), specialization of roles and functions (i.e., academics focus on teaching; and student affairs focus on student support), incongruent missions and pragmatic differences (i.e., academics focus on student learning and research; student affairs focus on student development), and lack of common language (i.e., departmental or staff jargon and terminology). Most notable structural inhibitors include: hierarchical separation (i.e., noted lack of respect between faculty and administrators), differing systems of reward and compensation (i.e., tenure), resource limitations, and organizational systems that support a division of labor (i.e., units working in isolation or loosely-coupled systems; American College Personnel Association, 1994; Beodeker, 2006; J. Cook & Lewis, 2007; Kezar 2005b; Nesheim et al., 2007; Martin & Murphy, 2000; Schroeder, 1999a; Perez, 2016).

Cultural complexities. The history of functional fragmentation in higher education has led academic and student affairs divisions to be described as having fundamentally different professional cultures (Engstrom & Tinto, 2000). Effective working relationships between academic and student affairs divisions are complicated by multi-dimensional cultural nuances of the two professional groups (Perez, 2016). For instance, faculty work autonomously toward individual goals and are generally recognized for excellence in teaching and/or research (Austin, 1990; Beodeker, 2006). Additionally, collaborations for scholarship efforts between faculty—mostly in similar areas or disciplines—are quite common (Bergquist & Pawlak, 2008). Becher

and Trowler (2001) described this autonomy-focused phenomenon as faculty maintaining their “tribe and territory” (p. 23).

In contrast, student affairs administrators focus on supporting out-of-classroom student programs and must rely more heavily on bureaucratic processes and intra-organizational networking to execute their roles (Kuo, 2009; Rosser, 2000). Engstrom and Tinto (2000) explained that student affairs practitioners and academicians do not always understand each other’s cultural norms, nor do they accurately comprehend each other’s roles and responsibilities. The resulting cultural differences lead to “misunderstandings, mistrust, disrespect, conflict, disdain, and antagonism” (p. 428). These beliefs are magnified when focus, whether in hypotheticals or in practices, is placed on cultural differences rather than on the commonalities that exist in their values and mission for educating students (Arcelus, 2008).

To empirically explain the divergent cultures between academic and student affairs, Perez (2016) used an existing organizational concept called the “Third Space Culture for Collaboration.” This qualitative study investigated organizational and leadership conditions that can help bridge the cultural divide between academic and student affairs. In this investigation, certain thematically linked cultural barriers emerged, including: (a) a desire from both divisions to maintain status quo, (b) feelings that the other group had the wrong motivations for tasks, (c) incongruent values, and (d) a lack of intentionality in working together. These findings correlate with previous studies and anecdotal literature on the hindering role cultural barriers can play between these subcultures collaborating (Beodeker, 2006; Gulley & Mullendore, 2014; Kezar et al. 2002; Kezar & Lester, 2009; Kuh et al. 2011).

The fundamental element of the cultural differences between these two groups is that they have different definitions of the role educators’ play in facilitating academic success (Brown, 1990; Perez, 2016). Generally, faculty’s definition focuses on developing students’

learning and intellect instead of their social/emotional/physical qualities (Philpott & Strange, 2003), whereas student affairs officers focus more on student development outside the classroom (AAHE et al., 1998). These dichotomous cultures reinforce the separation between faculty and administrator functions, which affects their willingness and ability to collaborate on projects for student success (Golde & Pribbenow, 2000; Stinger, Steckler, & Johnson, 1989). Using an ethnographic case study methodology, Arcelus (2008) explored the tension between academic and student affairs staff members' roles at one residential liberal arts campus by exploring people's perceptions that influence the potential for cross-functional collaborations between the divisions. Using a case study methodology, he found that faculty had perceptions that student affairs projects are distracting students from the academic mission of the institution and that their role as educators was difficult to understand because it was not discipline-based. In contrast, student affairs felt that faculty were not concerned with the lives of students beyond their work with them in a particular discipline and communicating with faculty about student development and success was generally difficult. Through this study, Arcelus found that meaningful, interconnected relationships that encourage dialogue—as well as space for discord—regarding common goals, values, and institutional mission help foster collaborative environments and programs to create a seamless learning environment where each actor's role as an educator is valued.

On another note, faculty skepticism about administrators' efficacy in student learning further intensifies the divide (Fried, 1995; Kuh et al., 2011; Sandeen, 2000; Skaggs, 2015). Faculty perceive student support staff as more task oriented with little connection to student learning outcomes (Skaggs, 2015). Faculty may also lack comprehensive knowledge about the actual roles and responsibilities of student support professionals (Kuh et al., 2011). In contrast, Chief Student Affairs Officers generally value student learning and intentionally create programs

that promote alignment with teaching and learning outcomes (Keeling, 2004; NASPA, 2017; Newton & Smith, 1996). Additionally, student affairs personnel have misconceptions about faculty not caring about students outside the classroom (Creeden, 1988; Philpott & Strange, 2003). In a qualitative study conducted by Hargrave (2000) at five public universities, interviews of faculty and student affairs professionals showed a significant difference in perceptions between the two groups regarding roles in student learning and success in living-learning communities, which ultimately affected how the members of academic and student affairs units interacted with each other.

Lack of a common understanding of functions is highly problematic to developing a shared vision for collaborative practices. In a seminal study, Philpott and Strange (2003) executed a case study investigating collaboration between academic and student affairs at one Midwestern university. At this site, academic and student affairs officers were attempting to work together to create the Cambridge Learning Center, a living-learning, residential college program. A strong impression that emerged from this case study was the power that conflicting cultures had in terms of the expectations about collaborating, and the rigidity in defining participants' roles based on existing divisional cultures. Findings showed that academic and student affairs professionals were compelled to work together, but had difficulty realigning their professional perspectives to work collaboratively. Most significantly, cultural differences related to functional purpose and roles, divergent task motivations, reward structures, management, planning, and communication style negatively influenced the process of collaborating. The researchers concluded that transparency about cultural differences in communication, working norms, and role expectations at the onset of collaboration could assist with constructing and implementing partnership initiatives.

Deficiencies in communication between academic and student affairs regarding initiatives are a key issue identified by researchers (Cook et al., as cited in J. Cook & Lewis, 2007; Kuh et al., 2005; Sandeen, 2004). For example, Sandeen (2004) identified that one of the factors that most influenced failing partnerships was poor communication or the inability for academic and student affairs personnel to produce a common language, terms, or method of shared communication regarding collaborative practices. Cultural differences even permeate into how these groups define acts of collaboration. Chief Academic Affairs Officers define collaboration using interpersonal phrases such as: *sharing information*, *cooperation*, *dialogue*, and *synergistic efforts*. Additionally, Chief Student Affairs Officers more frequently use philosophical and mission-focused expressions such as: “having a history and sense of tradition which values collaboration, shared vision and willingness to collaborate, working with people, and a value for others’ opinions” (LoParco, 1991, p. 121). Martin and Murphy (2000) asserted that this lack of common vernacular is the “final, but most enduring hurdle” (p. 10) to bridging cultural divides between academic and student affairs.

Academic and student affairs personality types, philosophies on educating, and perceptions of roles are deeply embedded in their individual professional cultures (Arcelus, 2008). As such, both groups bring cultural assumptions to their interactions with each other, which can make collaboration complex. These perceptions lead people to believe that one group is so different from another that the differences that do exist become exceptionally significant, thereby hindering collaborative work (Fried, 1995). The alternative is to attempt to understand each other’s culture within the context of the overall institutional culture, as will be discussed further in the theoretical framework section. In addition to cultural barriers, structural inhibitors also influence the development, implementation, and sustainability of collaborative practices.

Structural complexities. Structural constraints such as hiring parameters, loosely coupled organizational systems, and lack of reward structures contribute to the rift between academic and student affairs partnerships (Del Favero & Bray, 2005; Harper & Jackson, 2011; Kezar & Lester, 2009). Understanding these structural barriers provides insight into how campuses can reorganize to encourage collaborations.

Over the past few decades, universities have developed a greater polarity in organizational structure, one under administrative units and the other under the purview of academic departments (Bergquist & Pawlak, 2008; Kezar & Lester, 2009; Polnariiev & Levy, 2016). Changes to faculty employment policies and increased resources allocated to hiring administrative roles have contributed to heightened tensions. For example, the Delta Cost Project found that from 1987 to 2012, universities and colleges collectively added over 500,000 administrators and professional employees. Additionally, from 1975-2005, disaggregated data showed that university staffing increased in the U.S. by 85 percent for administrator roles, 240 percent for professional staff, and 51 percent for faculty (American Institutes for Research, 2012). With this increase in professional staff across all sectors of higher education, faculty concern has heightened regarding the impact of adding unnecessary student support roles. Contemporary research shows that faculty members feel that institutions are enlarging their administrative staff at the expense of their core mission of education (Campos, 2015; Ginsberg, 2011). Florenthal and Tolstikov-Mast (2012) conducted a quantitative study with 272 faculty and administrators to determine factors that affected organizational culture. Findings showed a strong relationship between tensions and hiring practices, with an indication that tensions would minimize if they could construct a shared vision about hiring processes.

The prevalent organizational structure of a loosely coupled system in universities (Orton & Weick, 1990) presents further structural challenges. In loosely coupled systems, departments

are autonomous in their daily work, creating limited transparency and communication about initiatives being implemented in other areas (Bolman & Deal, 1991). Because of the lack of connection between units, partnering on common institutional initiatives is limited (J. Cook & Lewis, 2007). If collaborations do occur, they are generally improvised, small scale, and prone to failure (Kezar & Lester, 2009).

Merely having an agreement and mutual understanding of the cultural and structural divide is not enough to sustain collaborations. In a survey study of senior student affairs officers at 60 U.S. institutions, Kezar (2003b) found that structural and cultural obstacles do have statistical significance in terms of impacting the success of collaborations. However, a later study by Kezar and Lester (2009) established that these challenges could be mitigated by establishing conditions focused on intentionally building a campus-wide commitment to collaboration.

Organizational and social conditions to foster collaborative culture. How can institutions implement collaborations in a cultural and structural environment that encourages individualized work? As this study investigated meaning making regarding developing successful cross-functional collaborations, it is important to understand the organizational and social conditions necessary to facilitate collaborative practice.

The current literature encourages realignment of certain organizational and social conditions before trying to create partnerships. Conditions that have been identified as necessary to create collaborative campus cultures include: (a) alignment of mission with daily practices, institutional goals, and operating principles; (b) establishment of a network for faculty and staff to have daily interactions and consistent communication; (c) reinforcement of organizational structures that support collaboration and build trust among stakeholders; (d) development of reward structures for collaborative work; (e) leadership and senior-level administrators placing a priority on cooperative ventures; (f) creation of a regular set of campus values that are shared

among the community; and (g) systematic assessments that reinforce the value of executed collaborative practices (J. Cook & Lewis, 2007; Kezar, 2005a; Kezar & Lester, 2009; Kinzie & Kuh, 2004; Kuh et al., 2005; Perez, 2016, Whitt et al., 2008). Campuses need to be opportunistic in creating collaborations, and adaptable in the partnership model used based on institutional norms (Kuh 1996; Martin & Murphy, 2000; Martin & Samuels, 2001). One of the most valuable assets to creating collaborations is utilizing interpersonal relationships and building communication networks (Perez, 2016; Whitt et al., 2008). For instance, Gaur (2009) used action research to determine that physical proximity created opportunities for interpersonal relationships to materialize organically through repeated interactions, which resulted in the development of stronger collaborations.

Congruence of organizational culture and institutional practices is an important factor in supporting collaborations. Cho and Sriram (2016) used quantitative analysis to measure what variables potentially strengthen student affairs administrators' collaborative competency to partner with academic affairs personnel. Interestingly, they found that student affairs professionals who perceived their institution as having a culture of collaboration rated their own collaboration skills higher than those from campuses that did not stress a culture of collaboration.

Organizational cultural and structural conditions are important factors to consider when establishing collaborations. Emphasis should be placed on the importance of understanding and appreciating the culture of both faculty and student affairs and the impact of organizational structures when developing collaborations (Kezar & Lester, 2009; Philpott & Strange, 2003). However, partnerships tend to be more likely to fail to take root if strategic development models are not systematically implemented (Martin & Murphy, 2000). Accordingly, I review established developmental models that can help campuses create sustainable collaborative practices.

Developmental models for collaboration. Achieving successful collaborations does not come easily (Kezer & Lester, 2009); it requires that all participants engage as equal partners in the development process (Aggarwal, 2013; Lyons & Gitlin, 2008). After evaluations of selected exemplary collaborative practices at U.S. campuses, Kezar (2005a) created a three-stage development model for higher education collaborations. As development models for collaborations in higher education were nonexistent at the time, many of the foundational elements of this model are based on seminal intra-organizational models prepared by Arino, Torre, and Ring (2005), Kanter (1996), Mohrman et al. (1995), and Ring and Van de Ven (1994). Stage one focuses on building commitment within the institution by convincing stakeholders of the importance of collaborative work. For instance, creating a standing committee that communicates the importance of collaboration was most critical in helping establish new values. The importance of establishing relationships is unique to development models for higher education collaboration because social conditions are more important than rewards or recognition (Kezar, 2001b, 2006). Stage two focuses on the development of shared missions, acquiring the support of leadership, and leveraging both shared missions and support of leadership to create a change to existing culture when establishing collaborations. Some examples include aligning college strategic plans and institutional mission with collaborative practices or leadership aligning funds to support collaborative initiatives. As this study focused on campus mission as a variable to facilitate and support collaborative work, Kezar's (2001b, 2006) findings show that there is a potential relationship between campus-wide mission for student success and sustainable collaborations. This finding points to the importance of having mission alignment in a development model for collaboration.

Stage three looks to sustain the antecedent stages by developing structures, such as cross-functional networks, providing more merit-based weight to collaborative projects in reward and

promotional systems, and assessment procedures that support campus-wide collaborative ventures. Whitt et al. (2008) identified similar good practices for developing successful collaborations, adding that development models need to consider the existing institutional culture, and the power of establishing disbursed leadership instead of hierarchical forms. Because most research on collaboration does not focus on developmental dynamics (Kezar & Lester, 2009), there is a need for research that focuses on the development of collaborations in higher education.

Collaboration theorists, who study intra-organizational alliances outside higher education, developed models to explain the integration process of collaboration (Jones, 2013; Morris & Burns, 1997; Morris, Gibson, Leavitt, & Jones, 2013). The seminal collaboration development models generally utilize core elements from Tuckman's (1965) four-step model: *form*, *storm*, *norm*, and *perform*. Additional steps of *transform* and *adjourn* were added more recently (Bailey & Koney, 2000). Additionally, collaboration intensity evolves as it develops, on a low (informal) to high (formal) integration scale. The first stage is *cooperation*, (also known as a networking alliance), which is the sharing of information with support from stakeholders. Progressively, the second stage is *coordination* (also known as coalition), which occurs when common tasks and compatible goals are developed among stakeholders. The next stage is full *collaboration*, where there is an integration of strategies and a developed collective purpose among stakeholders. Finally, and least implemented, is *coadunation*, where a unified structure is developed in which stakeholders combined their cultures (Bailey & Koney, 2000; Gajda, 2004).

The culminating element of any collaborative developmental model is closing the loop with an assessment of the partnership's success in accomplishing identified goals (Bailey & Koney, 2000; Kezar, 2005a; Mohrman et al., 1995; Schroeder, 1999). Assessment is an area that needs further research, as many higher education collaborations do not have a systematic

assessment model to evaluate effectiveness (Kezar & Lester, 2009; Whitt et al., 2008). How and why collaborations are developed and having measurable outcomes that are assessed for institutional accountability, dramatically influence their potential for success and sustainability.

Collaboration to impact retention and persistence. Like most higher education institutions, and particularly private colleges and universities with higher tuition costs, Jesuit institutions have increasing external and internal pressures to sustain or increase retention and persistence. Currently, Jesuit colleges and universities have a wide range of retention and persistence rates. Jesuit schools have average retention rates of 70.8 percent, and persistence rates of 39.4-67.6 percent (4-6-years; American College Testing, 2010a; National Center for Educational Statistics, 2017). However, improving undergraduate student retention and persistence rates is a complex task and many efforts fail to improve outcomes (Reason, 2009). Maldonado, Rhoads, and Buenavista (2005) asserted that “the reality of failed retention efforts also has brought us to look for alternative methods and theories to enhance academic support systems for diverse student populations” (p. 606).

Contemporary retention models speak to the importance of students’ sense of connection to an institution but conclude that many institutions develop retention efforts in isolation or programmatic silos (Dale & Drake, 2005; Polnariev & Levy, 2016). Although these types of efforts can positively influence retention, they do not provide campus-wide experiences that make students feel integrated into the campus. Generally speaking, when it comes to retention programming, the norm is for these initiatives to be disconnected from other campus programs, which renders them inefficient, and in some cases, redundant (Polnariev & Levy, 2016). Casazza and Silverman (2013) made the case that there must be a paradigm shift in how retention and persistence initiatives are developed and implemented in higher education to create a larger impact. They stated that this shift must include a focus on systematic and intentional alignment

with particular student population's needs, collaboration with campus-wide programming, and purposeful alignment to the institutional mission. According to a white paper study done by Ruffalo Noel Levitz (2017) of 199 U.S. colleges and universities, whereas most campuses have committees charged with retention and student success (81 percent), their purpose, authority, and scope vary. The study found that although 56 percent of these committees were charged with making recommendations that affect multiple areas of campus, only 28 percent stated that they were empowered to execute on these decisions and implement procedures or policies.

Furthermore, the study found that of the 81 percent of campuses with a committee, only 48 percent agreed it was of good or excellent quality due to poor construction, limited leadership or oversight, and inadequate cross-functional and holistic representation on the committee. Fewer than eight in 10 schools had a designated position charged with leading student success efforts or a formal written plan to guide these efforts. Utilizing academic and student affairs collaborations to facilitate the development and implementation of retention efforts allows for systematic integration into many components of students' educational experiences (Manning, Kinzie & Schuh, 2015; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2011). The critical issue that such retention efforts raise for my study concerns the specific qualities of a Jesuit college or university as a mission-specific institution.

Characteristics of mission-specific institutions. At mission-specific institutions such as religiously affiliated schools, institutional mission has been shown to influence campus practices including academic programming, student engagement efforts, service-learning opportunities, and hiring practices (Cook et al., as cited in J. Cook & Lewis, 2007; Feldner, 2006; Kezar, 2005a; Kezar & Kinzie, 2006). As stated by Kezar and Kinzie (2006), "The mission of an institution is one of the most visible and powerful articulations of the culture and usually relates to values and meaning for a campus. The institutional mission provides guidance for people to

act” (p. 152). Schein (2010) described mission and institutional philosophy as the hidden layer of organizational culture. The organizational mission, according to Kuh et al. (2005), “Is composed of tacit understandings about what is important to the institution and its constituents and unspoken but deeply held values and beliefs about students and their education” (p. 27). Therefore, by examining the degree of congruence between institutions’ mission and institutional practices, partnerships can be implemented to positively influence student success.

What is institutional mission? An institution’s mission is a formal articulation of overarching characteristics, purpose, values, desired outcomes, and organizational goals (Kuh et al., 2005). In higher education, the mission statement is a significant way for institutions to describe their culture to stakeholders through a common philosophy. As Kuh et al. (2005) stated, “The mission establishes the tone of a college and conveys its educational purposes, whether based on religious, ideological, or educational beliefs, giving direction to all aspects of institutional life, including the policies and practices that foster student success” (p. 25). Mission statements are not only a key indicator of an institution’s identity but are important to organizational practices such as accreditation, strategic planning, and prospective student recruitment (Kezar & Kinzie, 2006; Morpew & Hartley, 2006). Empirical evidence shows that mission statements differ in content by institution type. For instance, a study of over 1,000 4-year institutions found that mission statements have thematic similarities according to public or private classifications, and that mission statements were being used to communicate values and purpose to internal and external stakeholders (Morpew & Hartley, 2006).

The process of articulating an institution’s mission has two benefits. First, a clear mission helps organizational members to be intentional in developing activities that conform to the institution’s priority goals. Second, a shared sense of purpose can motivate stakeholders to communicate institutional values appropriately to students and external constituents (Graham et

al., 2017; Kezar & Kinzie, 2006; Morphey & Hartley, 2006). However, there is not unanimous support by researchers that missions have innate value to institutional practices. Many question, how impactful, purposeful, and necessary is the mission statement? Institutions may just use it to promote their purpose or goals to external stakeholders, but then rarely follow through on alignment with the institution's identity (Davies, 1986; Feldner, 2006). Additionally, the majority of institutional mission statements are broadly focused, so they may fail to have any direct effect on daily practices or community values (Morphey & Hartley, 2006; Graham et al., 2017).

Despite some disagreement, the fundamental purpose of the mission is to formally capture the philosophy, character, and values of an institution (Kezar & Kinzie, 2006). Therefore, it seems appropriate that any campus that desires to support collaborative work would articulate that desire within their mission (Kezar & Lester, 2009).

The role of mission in institutional practices. Higher education institutions are expected to have explicit mission statements, but what affect do they have on executing daily organizational practices? Although not directly looking at the impact on collaborative practices, Kezar and Kinzie (2006) examined the role that espoused mission and lived mission play in enhancing student engagement at selected institutions. By *espoused mission*, they referenced missions that do not guide daily practices and are not necessarily embodied in the culture of the institution through faculty, staff, and students. An example of espoused mission is how an institution describes itself in a mission statement. In terms of *lived mission*, this refers to an institution's active mission: "what they actually do and who they serve" (p. 153) as lived through the values, assumptions, and practices of campus constituents. The lived mission guides the institution's actions, policies, and activities. However, the espoused mission can be the lived mission if the daily practices and actions of the institutional actors align with both missions. In

addition, every institution has a unique mission (hopefully aligned with the lived mission) and an institutional mission (type and model). Examining two levels of mission—unique mission and institutional mission—through case studies, Kezar and Kenzie suggested that the unique mission of campuses has a greater impact on student engagement and overall institutional culture around lived mission. Institutional type mission was a more important factor in implementing student engagement policies and practices. Looking at student success practices, Kuh et al. (2011) identified similar findings of alignment of executed education practices with mission; they noted that alignment of mission and education practices led to stronger student engagement outcomes. Counter to these findings, Mussi (2008) investigated how mission, identity, and tradition translated into implemented operations of student affairs. Although the study was limited to a single personnel group, staff stated that mission mattered to them personally, but the majority felt challenged by the importance of incorporating the institution's particular religious mission—in this case, Catholic religiosity—into daily practice working with students. The staff did not feel that student outcomes were contingent on mission alignment.

Mission-specific institutions, such as religious institutions, consider further research on mission engagement to be critical (AJCU, 2016). The current study is important in this regard in that it strove to fill some of the gap in existing research on collaboration, while simultaneously investigating the role mission has as an implementation influence on constructing collaborations.

Jesuit values and Ignatian mission: Student learning and success. Like other religiously affiliated institutions, Jesuit colleges and universities sustain a strong connection to their core values and institutional missions (Feldner, 2006; Graham et al. 2017; Lowery, 2012; Markland, 2009; Weiss, 2009). These institutional core values are supposed to be both a part of all that is done at the institution and part of the educational experience of their graduates (Dickel & Ishii-Jordan, 2008). In many cases, the faith-based core values—those values that make the

institutions distinctive and cohesive—are called charisms, and it is expected that these will be a part of the instructional process, define how campus constituents interact with students, and be instilled in the experiences of students and stakeholders (T. Cook, 2004). A firm foundation in charisms as promoted by St. Ignatius, the founder of the Society of Jesus, has always been the hallmark of Jesuit/Ignatian institutional heritage. Jesuit institutions have charisms that align with creating collaborative practices to support student success, given their whole-student approach to student development and learning. Therefore, these institutions provide an important venue for investigating how an institution's core values and mission relates to distinctive approaches for creating cross-functional collaboration (Feldner, 2006).

The Society of Jesus' involvement in education began in 1537, commencing with St. Ignatius. The Jesuits' major undertakings in education began in response to the Society's own needs to provide suitable education for those seeking membership in the Order; however, their mission toward education for the masses grew, and they became one of the first orders with a primary mission of education within the Catholic Church. By 1600, there were 245 Jesuit schools, including 15 universities, and by 1749 the Jesuits had established 875 schools around the world—some 700 for the education of lay students and the remainder for training individuals for the priesthood (Rhodes, 1989). In the United States, Jesuits helped assimilate and educated waves of immigrants from 1814-1914 by establishing 28 Jesuit colleges, all which were open access. The purpose of Jesuit educational institutions was described by St. Ignatius in the fourth part of the Jesuit Society's Constitutions as aiding fellow men to the knowledge and love of God (Jesuits, & Saint Ignatius of Loyola, 1970).

Several charisms made these institutions truly *Jesuit* in character and practice. First, was the conviction that moral excellence was the ultimate goal of Jesuit education. Second, that moral excellence could not be achieved without synergy between intellectual and scholarly

excellence. Third, is the priority given to teaching and learning through the engagement of critical inquiry with students both inside and outside the classroom. As is the case today, Jesuits' educational mission places an emphasis on teachers and educational community members serving not only as instructors, but also as mentors and spiritual advisors through the educational journey.

In the United States, there are still 28 Jesuit colleges and universities. Common charisms of modern-day Jesuit institutions are still focused on critical thinking, rigorous academic standards, and holistic student success (AJCU, 2016). To truly understand the unique mission of Jesuit institutions and values-based education practices, an explanation of Ignatius mission is necessary. The Ignatius mission is a spiritual understanding that focuses on collaborating to help others. Specifically, the term *cura personalis* (Latin for “care for the whole person”; 1 Corinthians 12:12, The New King James Version), describes the cultural and spiritual purpose of Jesuit educators regarding academics and care for students; also referred to as the holistic formation approach (Kolvenbach, 1989). *Cura personalis* implores educators to question, “How they can appropriately unite as collaborators in mission to serve together with deepening affection to the mission” of educating students (Society of Jesus, 2008, p. 3). H. Gray (2003) summarized Ignatian followers as, “People who want to work in ways that help other people” (p. 1). Fundamental Ignatian principles focus on collaboration in the form of teaching and learning, collective reflection, social justice, and *cura personalis* (Kolvenbach, 2001). T. Cook (2004) and Taplin (2002) stated that “Jesuit and Ignatian tradition views education holistically and emphasizes formation of the total person—mind, heart, body, and soul” (p. 2). This concept of holistic education—educating the heart, mind, body, and spirit of students—also resonates in influential student success literature as a method to increase persistence.

The fundamental charisms of Jesuit education are visualized (in Figure 1) in six categories: magis (striving for excellence and providing the scaffolding necessary to enable all students to move toward excellence); women and men for and with others (collaborating, sharing gifts, pursuing justice, and having concern for the marginalized); cura personalis; unity of heart, mind, and soul (care for the whole person); ad majorem dei gloriam (directly translates to *for the glory of god*, refers to a way of being and living life in a discerning and contemplative way); and forming and educating agents of change (whole-student formation through critical teaching and learning practices). Utilizing these principles, Jesuit education offers three foundations to their students: committed and principled faculty and administrators, student-centered learning community, and excellence in scholarship (O'Malley, 2015). These charisms of the Jesuit and Ignatian educational mission speak to strengthening connections within the community to combat the disciplinary isolation and fragmentation that now characterize much higher education, both within and beyond the Jesuit and Catholic institutions (Rhodes, 1989). The Jesuit mission attempts to provide students with a distinct moral dimension in their education through a learning environment that embraces and nurtures campus involvement in students' academic, social, spiritual, and emotional growth.

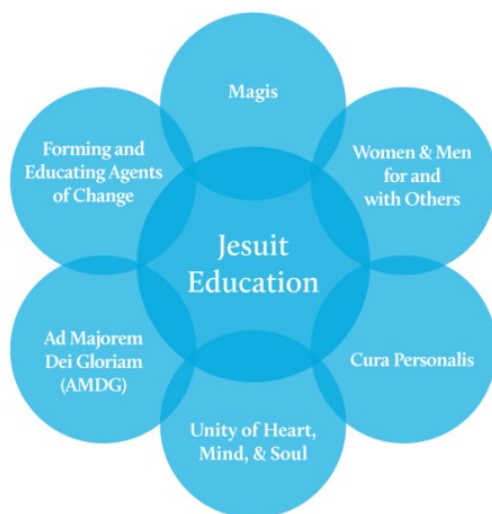


Figure 1. Characteristics (charisms) of Jesuit education.

As stated previously, the Jesuit and Ignatius philosophy acts as a reminder to administrators and faculty that the institution's mission includes not just the growth of the mind but also the development of the whole person. Through extensive case studies, Chickering and Kuh (2005) examined the everyday workings of 20 Project DEEP (Documenting Effective Educational Practice) schools that were deemed educationally effective colleges and universities. The Project DEEP sample represents selected schools that have higher-than-predicted graduation rates and have demonstrated through National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) results that they have effective policies and practices for working with students of different abilities and aspirations. One Jesuit institution, Gonzaga University, was included in the DEEP Project sample and the study concluded that this school's success in student learning and engagement relied heavily on following Ignatian principles and mission. For example, the study found that

Gonzaga sends two consistent messages to newcomers: 1) you will have many different opportunities to pursue your educational goals due to the principles and context of a Jesuit community, and 2) Gonzaga is a place where students form deep, enduring relationships with their teachers and other students. (p. 2)

In their study, Chickering and Kuh highlighted a strong alignment of mission and student engagement that could lead to improved student persistence. However, like most higher education institutions, and particularly private colleges and universities with higher tuition costs, Jesuit institutions have increasing external and internal pressures to sustain or increase retention and persistence initiatives to enhance student success (AJCU, 2016). Therefore, this current study is specifically important for Jesuit institutions, as they develop and maintain student persistence initiatives using collaborative practices.

While measuring the efficacy of mission is ambiguous, Jesuit institutions' characteristics make them an appropriate site to evaluate how academic and student affairs personnel perceive

lived and espoused missions to affect implementation of collaborative practices. Therefore, this research investigated how Jesuit and Ignatian core values speak directly to the development, implementation, and sustainability of academic and student affairs collaborations in order to retain students.

Section III: Theoretical Framework

A primary concept undergirding this study is that organizational dynamics of higher education, particularly cultural and structural conditions, heavily influence the development, implementation, and sustainability of academic and student affairs collaborations. Therefore, the use of organizational theory to identify patterns of organizational dynamics and processes was deemed an appropriate framework to explain how organizations' human and systems components behave, function, change, and produce outcomes for stakeholders (Bolman & Deal, 2008; Morgan, 2006). However, organizational processes such as cross-functional collaborations cannot develop in isolation from the larger context, nor function independent of the embedded culture and structures cultivated overtime by members of the organization. Additionally, external pressures and influences regarding student success and institutional accountability must be taken into consideration when developing collaborations focused on undergraduate persistence. Research indicates that effective collaborations recognize the value and importance of the institutional culture and are mindful of the organizational structure and unique characteristics of the institution (Birnbaum, 1988; Kezar & Lester, 2009; Whitt et al., 2008). To situate how these complex organizational elements specifically affect the life cycle of collaborative practices within Jesuit institutions, three frameworks of organizational theory provide lenses for studying academic and student affairs collaborations: culture, structure, and open systems.

Organizational culture. The culture of an organization guides institutional goals and provides a framework for the shared identity, norms, behaviors, expectations, and assumptions of

the organization. However, within an organization, multiple subcultures can affect organizational processes and practices (Hoy & Miskel, 2001; Schein, 2010). As this study investigated the influence cultural differences between academic and student affairs have on collaborative practices, a discussion of organizational culture theory is necessary.

Culture is a fundamental component of organizational functioning, as it creates order out of the complex dynamics of organizational life. The effects of culture on processes, practices, and policies are discussed widely in organizational theory research (Birnbaum, 1988; Bergquist & Pawlak, 2008; Bolman & Deal, 2008; Morgan, 2006; Ouchi & Wilkins, 1985; Schein, 2010; Smircich, 1983; Tierney, 1988). However, organizational culture is not easily defined, as there is no consensus on the term's application, how it is created, foundational concepts, or the best method to study the phenomenon (Smircich, 1983). As such, organizational culture has been defined in terms of symbols, customs, languages, ceremonies, and myths (Bolman & Deal, 2008; Ouchi, 1981; Van Maanen, 1979); a shared orientation or set of cognitive frames that unite people together with a common identity and guides the group's actions (Bergquist & Pawlak, 2008; Hoy & Miskel, 2001); and shared meaning and context for a group based on basic assumptions, mission, philosophy, espoused values, and artifacts created by groups over time (Schein, 2010; Smircich, 1983). Ravasi and Schultz (2006) and Schein (2010) stated that culture is not only a shared set of assumptions that guides organizational behavior, but also that those assumptions then create a pattern of behavior and perceptions that are taught to new organizational members as a way to interact with each other and stakeholders.

Some researchers believe that culture implies stability and integration of these elements, at as it ties together rituals, climate, values and behaviors into a coherent whole at the organization-level based on history and sentiment held by all members (Clark, 1970). Integration perspective studies the extent to which values, beliefs, norms, and priorities are congruent and

embodied among all individuals and subgroups (Schein, 2010; Tierney, 1988). Specifically, for higher education, Tierney (1988) developed a six-concept framework (environment, mission, socialization, information, strategy, and leadership) to diagnose culture with the “goal of helping leaders understand organizational culture to minimize conflict and help foster development of shared goals” (p. 5). An issue with this model is that it describes organizational life, but does not link interpretations to deeper individualized assumptions (Smerek, 2010). To address this gap, other researchers have noted that organizational culture is made up of differentiated or fragmented layers of subcultures with individualized assumptions and values (Cohen & March, 1974; Martin & Frost, 1996). The differentiation perspective views organizational members as having cohesive disciplinary subcultures based on occupational identity as opposed to a unified organizational identity (Van Maanen & Barley, 1985). An example of this in higher education is autonomous faculty subcultures based on academic disciplines (Bercher, 1994; Bergquist & Pawlak, 2008). This perspective views members as being involved with more than one level of culture (i.e., disciplinary, specialization, organization) and forming into clusters of subcultures, some that harmonize with one another and some that do not (Harman, 1989; Martin & Frost, 1996).

Specifically examining higher education, Bergquist and Pawlak (2008) created a framework to understand how the complexities of integration, differentiation, and fragmentation perspectives correlate and coincide for individuals working in colleges and universities. In their book, *Engaging the Six Cultures of the Academy*, they describe six cultures found in higher education: collegial, managerial, developmental, advocacy, virtual, and tangible. Bergquist and Pawlak suggested that these cultures—all of which exist simultaneously—have different priorities, but they can also have overlapping commonalities in values and purpose at the organizational level. Finding ways to identify shared values and purpose is particularly important

when studying the process of creating collaborations in higher education. As colleges and universities tend to have alignment with their core values through their mission and history (Kezar & Lester, 2009), those essential values can act as a bedrock to support collaborative practices by giving shared meaning to members from different subcultures.

Although the concept of culture has a variety of meanings and perspectives in organizational research, it is a foundational concept in understanding phenomena of social order, behaviors, and patterning of life experiences within different organizational contexts (Smircich, 1983). Using culture as a theoretical framework encourages researchers to consider organizational conflict not in isolation, but as a part of the larger organizational life, and to consider why different groups in the organization hold varying perceptions about institutional practices (Tierney, 1988). In addition, it provides a lens to examine how shared mission and values can cultivate environments that support collaborations even between disparate stakeholders. Organizational culture is a particularly important framework for the proposed study, as Jesuit institutions have an established academic mission, embraced among the 28 colleges and universities that acts as a unifying purpose and identity. However, even with an identifiable and unified culture, each organization has unique subcultures and institutional dynamics that make establishing collaborations more complex. As noted by Tierney (1988),

While institutions may have very similar missions and curricula they can perform quite differently because of the way their identities are communicated to internal and external constituents and because of the varying perceptions these groups may hold. Additionally, institutions are influenced by powerful, external factors such as demographic, economic, and political conditions, yet they are also shaped by strong forces that emanate from within. (p. 3)

As such, the next sections will discuss the internal and external factors of structural framework and open systems as lenses for examining collaborations.

Structural dynamics in academic organizations. The structural framework provides a lens for understanding the social architecture and structural dynamics within an organization, as it provides a theoretical basis to investigate how organizations allocate resources and specialized responsibilities across different units and how these diverse efforts can integrate to pursue common goals (Bolman & Deal, 2008). In the most basic terms, structure acts as a blueprint or skeleton for interactions and expectations for internal and external constituencies and has the ability to enhance or constrain what an organization can accomplish (Birnbaum, 1988). As Bolman and Deal (2008) noted, the structural lens settles issues concerning “who does what, when the ‘what’ gets done, and how individual efforts mesh to ensure harmony” (p. 52). Using the structural framework, organizational theory literature characterizes higher education as an assemblage of smaller functional units loosely linked to each other with minimal interdependence, meaning that units (such as academic and student affairs) are somewhat self-maintaining and are most likely to find coalitions within their existing systems rather than by collaborating cross-functionally (Gumport & Sporn, 1999; Weick, 1976). Therefore, a common analogy used to describe this internal structure of educational organizations is aptly termed *loosely coupled systems*.

Loosely coupled systems. The term loosely coupled systems, as opposed to tightly coupled systems, is generally used to describe organizational structures like higher education that have system or subsystem elements that are responsive to each other but also preserve their own identities and some logical separateness (Birnbaum, 1988; Weick, 1976). When this concept is applied to studying social systems within organizations (i.e., functional units, professional subunits, faculty senate, departments, academic disciplines, etc.), not only can there be discontinuities in the way the systems elements are interconnected, but also the participants themselves can have intentions, preconceptions, and wills that affect the organization’s

functionality (Birnbaum, 1988). This structural concept can be viewed from two different perspectives; loose coupling allows for innovations to occur in various units without great dependency on other units, and in contrast, loose coupling can be seen as dysfunctional, causing a lack of integration, creating resistance to collaboration, and limiting shared decision-making (Orton & Weick, 1990). In addition, this system encourages the creation of unit subcultures, which, as stated previously, can be problematic when encouraging independent units to work in collaboration (Storberg-Walker, 2004).

Collaborations themselves may be forms of loosely coupled structures, as many are not embedded in a single organizational context but represent cross-organizational cooperation through a common purpose. In this sense, collaborations can be seen as temporary or fluid as opposed to traditional teams that are rigidly constructed within an organization (Gibson & Dribble, 2008; Schein, 2010). By examining higher education collaborations between academic and student affairs, I seek to offer an analysis of how the elements of loosely coupled systems influence collaborations. Additionally, I seek to add knowledge about how successful collaborations have a particular way of overcoming or strategically utilizing existing loosely coupled structures to create sustainable collaborative systems. As Birnbaum (1998) stated, “Effective administration may depend not on overcoming loose coupling, but on accepting and understanding it” (p. 41). Figure 2 illustrates how units within a loosely coupled arrangement could exist to foster collaborative practices. The seeming benefits of such a system are the numerous opportunities for cross-unit information sharing, shared communication, and the potential reduction of redundancy.

Loose coupling makes it possible for institutions to develop subsystems that respond separately to each internal and external demand on the system (Weick, 1976). Therefore, loose

coupling is not a symptom of a weak or failed organizational structure that needs correcting, but rather is an adaptive device that is essential to the survival of an open system.

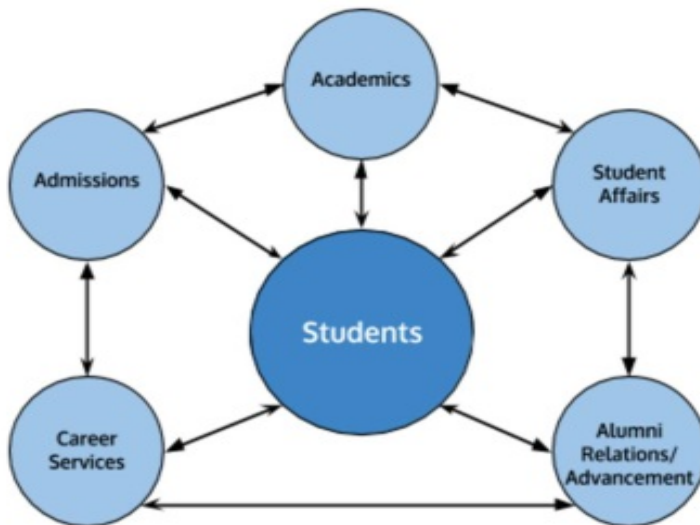


Figure 2. Collaboration in loosely coupled system of higher education.

Open systems. Organizational theory literature generally identifies two different types of systems: closed and open (Birnbaum, 1988; Morgan, 2006; Scott & Davis, 2007). For this study, the concept of open systems is used as a lens to articulate and conceptualize the complex external factors that affect functioning within higher education (Birnbaum, 1988; Kezar & Lester, 2009; Tierney, 1988). To understand the concept of open systems, a brief overview of closed systems perspectives is necessary first.

Closed systems place little focus on the influence of external factors on the organizations, and are more concerned with internal design (Morgan, 2006). Within closed systems perspectives of organizations, there are two established concepts: rational systems and natural systems. The rational systems perspective views organizations as “collectives that exhibit a relatively high degree of formalization and have individuals with the sole interest in reaching common goals” (Scott, 2007, p. 29). The rational view focuses most on the organization’s structure and its purpose but does not overtly address the moral or ethical position of an

organization (Scott & Davis, 2007). The natural systems perspective takes issue with the rational perspective's lack of accounting for social interests of organizational actors, and attributes more weight to the complexity of human motivation for organizational membership and performance (Scott & Davis, 2007). Although the natural perspective considers human behavior as a factor of organizational systems, it does not elaborate on the impact these actions have on the environment, or how environmental factors affect an organization.

To address these gaps, the open systems perspective was constructed as a framework to consider the changing, challenging, and chaotic environment in, within, and surrounding the organizational system. From an open systems perspective, these environmental elements are viewed as interdependent components of the organizational systems and their cultures, and therefore, affect all levels of institutional functioning (Bolman & Deal, 2008; Morgan, 2006). This perspective views organizations as both hierarchical and loosely coupled systems, with clustering of multiple subsystems that specialize in certain functional activities. A strong attribute of open systems is their ability to be dynamic, non-linear, and flexible. They are characterized as acting in a continuous cycle of self-maintenance (homeostasis) consisting of inputs, internal transformation, outputs, and feedback (Morgan, 2006). However, open systems are permeable to any and all environmental inputs such as people, ideas, resources, and involvement with other institutions or systems (Birnbaum, 1988). Therefore, organizations that function as open systems require careful leadership and strong institutional missions to “satisfy and balance internal needs and to adapt to environmental circumstances” (Morgan, 2006, p. 42).

Based on systems concepts, institutions of higher education should be viewed as loosely coupled, open systems that operate in constant interchange with their environment and have many complex interactions and interrelationships within their boundaries. Cross-functional collaborations can help facilitate organizational evolution and survival, if practices are congruent

with institutional systems. As J. Cook and Lewis (2007) stated, “Colleges and universities-academic and student affairs divisions in particular-must operate as a single system with ‘no outsiders’ if they are to educate successfully 21st century students and deliver on the changing demands society places on them” (p. 6). The organizational concept of open systems is central to the current study, as external pressures regarding improvement to student persistence and success rates are the impetus for developing the academic and student affairs collaborations.

Additionally, external factors such as funding, governance, and policy influence how colleges and universities make decisions about practices. Jesuit institutions in particular have a unique set of external pressures related to their religious affiliation, including guidance from the Catholic Church on institutional policies and practices and religious donor funding for specialized purposes. In addition to these religious influences, Jesuit colleges and universities must manage external oversight from the state and federal governments in order to maintain funding and accreditation.

Conclusion

As the literature shows, creating room for collaboration is only the first step in implementing sustained collaborations. Scholars have identified that institutions need to reduce structural and cultural barriers; establish organizational, social, and developmental conditions that support collaboration holistically; and align their mission with collaborative practices to meet the changing needs of their student populations. Researchers and practitioners need to know more about what institutions must do to foster cross-functional collaborations, how they are being implemented and sustained successfully, and how such collaborations align with an institutional mission. In reviewing the extant higher education collaboration literature, what has yet to be done is a qualitative analysis that delves deeply into participants’ perceptions about what promotes and sustains collaborations individually and organizationally. Specifically,

studying individuals with high levels of knowledge about collaborations at a variety of sites within the same institutional context (such as Jesuit colleges and universities) can help to identify how collaborative processes are developed, implemented, and sustained based on unique organizational cultures and student-centered institutional missions. To help answer these questions, this study investigated the development, implementation, and sustainability of collaborations at Jesuit institutions, as they in theory already have missions geared towards collaboration for student success. The findings from this study can help institutions more fully understand the perceptions and conditions that affect actual or anticipated collaborations between academic and student affairs at mission-oriented institutions.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

As revealed by the body of research explored in the previous chapters, complex organizational, interpersonal, and external factors are influencing academic and student affairs professionals' ability to develop, implement, and sustain collaborative practices focused on undergraduate retention to degree completion. Due to limited empirical evidence regarding strategic collaborations between these functional units, additional research is required to contextualize how cultural and structural organizational dynamics influence partnership development. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to conduct an in-depth investigation of the phenomenon of collaboration through the experiences of participants in actual and seemingly successful collaborations between academic and student affairs officers to promote student retention at U.S. Jesuit colleges and universities. This study is theoretically situated using the organizational frameworks of culture, structure, and open systems, to contextualize the internal and external institutional dynamics that influence the development of these collaborations.

The goal of this phenomenological study was to generate knowledge and understanding of such processes in a manner that might be helpful to future academic-student affairs collaborations at Jesuit institutions. However, the findings of this study could be utilized by non-Jesuit colleges and universities, especially those that are religiously based and mission-oriented, to glean information on the potential organizational elements that influence the development of successful collaborative efforts between academic and student affairs, the impact of mission alignment to organizational practices, and methods for assessing persistence-focused collaborations on their campuses.

Research Questions

The study posed the following research question: How do academic and student affairs officers at Jesuit colleges and universities define successful intra-organizational collaborations in

support of student persistence and how are such collaborations different from other campus collaborations?

- a. To what extent do cultural norms and the ways in which the institution is organized factor into the success of these collaborations?
- b. How do such institutions' members evaluate success of collaborative retention efforts?
- c. How, if at all, does the institution's Jesuit mission relate to distinctive approaches for creating collaboration?

Overview of Research Methodology

This study utilized a combination of qualitative research techniques to triangulate data collection, including semi-structured interviews and document analysis. Since the goals of the study were to understand the phenomenon of collaboration development, implementation, and sustainability aimed at increasing student retention, a phenomenological approach was deemed most appropriate. I say this because I wanted to capture the meaning making process and lived experiences of the phenomenon from the perspective of the participants (Creswell, 2014).

Examining a phenomenon such as intra-organizational collaboration, required a methodology that focused on the cognitive experiences of the organizational actors, and allowed those individuals to describe how they experience collaboration given their organizational context (Gil, 2014; Michalak & Ristino, 2013; Morgan & Smircich, 1980; Sanders, 1982). As such, phenomenology provided an avenue to examine the lived experiences view of organizations by “explicitly focusing on identifying perceptions those real members of an organization create as they experience a phenomenon in a given situation” (Lester, 1999, p. 1). As addressed in the theoretical framework section, organizations are more than a simple system with a singular cultural identity among its actors (Birnbaum, 1998). Processes that require collaboration between

subcultures are more than a technique or easily constructed enhancement; as there are intricate human dimensions that must be considered. Therefore, phenomenological approaches have the potential to uncover and unravel the complexities in creating successful collaborative processes and practices through by active participants, instead of the researcher attempting to explain the phenomenon through analysis.

Although all qualitative research draws from the philosophy of phenomenology in the emphasis on experience and interpretation, the phenomenological approach specifically focuses on depicting the essence or basic structure of an experience through people's consciousness of their everyday life and social action (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Schram, 2003). Unlike other qualitative approaches, phenomenology utilizes particular methods to ensure the essence of the phenomenon is documented with limited interpretation from the researcher. Although a standard procedure for phenomenology is not explicit, certain strategies of this research approach include beginning with an examination of the individual's conscious experience (phenomena), moving to an analysis of how meanings were developed, and ending with the ability for the individual to reflect and critically review his/her experiences (Chamberlin, 1974).

Traditional phenomenological approaches also require the researcher to explore his/her own experiences through a process called *epoche* (Moustakas, 1994). This process allows the researcher to more fully understand the dimensions of the phenomenon and to elaborate on his/her own personal viewpoints, biases, and assumptions. These judgments are *bracketed* to allow the researcher to explore the phenomenon through the participants' experiences (Husserl, 1970; Moustakas, 1994; Spiegelberg, 1972). There is debate within modern phenomenology about the degree to which researchers can fully remove biases and assumptions, but disclosing assumptions is generally seen as a valuable method to help reduce researcher preconceptions or postulations (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Van Manen, 2014).

While all these components are important to phenomenological research, there can be variations in how to conduct phenomenological studies based on the experience under examination. As stated by Polkinghorne (as cited in Creswell, 2014), the fundamental principle of this qualitative approach is that at the conclusion of the study, “The reader should come away from the phenomenology with the feeling, ‘I understand better what it is like for someone to experience that’” (p. 62).

Methods

In this section, I discuss several methods-related concerns, including the following: sites for the study, the population for the study (regarding interview participants), access and participant recruitment, data collection strategies, explication of the data, role management and ethical issues, and finally credibility/trustworthiness.

Sites for the study. As addressed in Chapter I, Jesuit colleges and universities have a distinctive mission that necessitates a clear focus on their institutional context and that result in Jesuit-specific findings; thus, examining their retention partnership efforts is critical to strengthening Jesuit colleges and universities. There are 28 Jesuit colleges and universities located in the United States. These colleges and universities are located in 18 states and the District of Columbia. The institutions range from major research universities to comprehensive universities, as well as from smaller colleges and universities that combine the liberal arts and professional studies to one strictly liberal arts college (as outlined in Table 1).

Table 1

US Jesuit Colleges and Universities (Data as of 2016)

Institution Name	Location	UG Enrollment	First-Year Retention (first time freshman)	4-Year Graduation	% of UG Ethnic/Racial Minorities*	Carnegie Classification
Boston College	Boston, Massachusetts	9,192	95%	89%	30%	Doctoral Universities: Highest Research Activity
Canisius College	Buffalo, New York	2,671	83%	60%	21%	Master's Colleges & Universities: Larger Programs
College of the Holy Cross	Worcester, Massachusetts	2,916	95%	89%	25%	Baccalaureate Colleges: Arts & Sciences Focus
Creighton University	Omaha, Nebraska	4,163	91%	72%	24%	Master's Colleges & Universities: Larger Programs
Fairfield University	Fairfield, Connecticut	3,970	88%	78%	16%	Master's Colleges & Universities: Larger Programs
Fordham University	Bronx, Manhattan	8,855	90%	75%	32%	Doctoral Universities: Higher Research Activity
Georgetown University	Washington, D.C.	7,562	96%	90%	27%	Doctoral Universities: Highest Research Activity
Gonzaga University	Spokane, Washington	5,041	94%	73%	23%	Master's Colleges & Universities: Larger Programs
John Carroll University	University Heights, Ohio	3,153	87%	57%	14%	Master's Colleges & Universities: Larger Programs
Le Moyne College	Syracuse, New York	2,877	87%	57%	16%	Master's Colleges & Universities: Larger Programs
Loyola Marymount University	Los Angeles, California	6,259	90%	70%	46%	Master's Colleges & Universities: Larger Programs
Loyola University Chicago	Chicago, Illinois	11,079	86%	64%	36%	Doctoral Universities: Higher Research Activity
Loyola University Maryland	Baltimore, Maryland	4,068	88%	76%	22%	Master's Colleges & Universities: Larger Programs
Loyola University New Orleans	New Orleans, Louisiana	2,691	78%	54%	39%	Master's Colleges & Universities: Larger Programs
Marquette University	Milwaukee, Wisconsin	8,334	90%	58%	23%	Doctoral Universities: Higher Research Activity
Regis University	Denver, Colorado	4,499	82%	56%	20%	Master's Colleges & Universities: Larger Programs
Rockhurst University	Kansas City, Missouri	2,077	87%	64%	20%	Master's Colleges & Universities: Larger Programs
Saint Joseph's University	Philadelphia, Pennsylvania	5,395	89%	72%	13%	Master's Colleges & Universities: Larger Programs
Saint Louis University	St. Louis, Missouri	8,248	89%	64%	28%	Doctoral Universities: Higher Research Activity

(continued)

Institution Name	Location	UG Enrollment	First-Year Retention (first time freshman)	4-Year Graduation	% of UG Ethnic/Racial Minorities*	Carnegie Classification
Saint Peter's University	Jersey City, New Jersey	2,525	79%	36%	73%	Master's Colleges & Universities: Larger Programs
Santa Clara University	Santa Clara, California	5,385	95%	77%	55%	Master's Colleges & Universities: Larger Programs
Seattle University	Seattle, Washington	4,711	86%	64%	36%	Master's Colleges & Universities: Larger Programs
Spring Hill College	Mobile, Alabama	1,370	76%	43%	25%	Baccalaureate Colleges: Arts & Sciences Focus
University of Detroit Mercy	Detroit, Michigan	2,672	81%	42%	29%	Master's Colleges & Universities: Larger Programs
University of San Francisco	San Francisco, California	6,782	86%	60%	51%	Doctoral Universities: Moderate Research Activity
University of Scranton	Scranton, Pennsylvania	3,910	89%	73%	15%	Master's Colleges & Universities: Larger Programs
Wheeling Jesuit University	Wheeling, West Virginia	1,043	71%	44%	15%	Master's Colleges & Universities: Medium Programs
Xavier University	Cincinnati, Ohio	4,572	83%	66%	21%	Master's Colleges Universities: Larger Programs

* Ethnic and racial minority groups categorized as institutions report to IPEDS: American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Black or African American, Hispanic/Latino, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander. Two or more Races/Ethnicities were also included. International students are not included. Data was collected from institutions' Common Data Set (CDS) reports through the Office of Institutional Research.

For this study, I identified 21 universities from the list of 28 Jesuit institutions outlined in Table 1 that have active retention collaborations between academic and student affairs. This was done through a review of current and recent campus programs, strategic plans, and evaluation of reports on retention and persistence. From this list of 21 universities, I selected six sites based on the following: (a) having identified retention collaborations, (b) categorized by Carnegie classification as Master's Colleges & Universities, and (c) having access to academic and student affairs participants. The rationale for using degree-awarding classification as the primary limiter in selecting the sample from the potential 21 sites was twofold. First, based on organizational culture literature, institutions have a unique institutional mission (i.e., Jesuit educational mission) as well as a particular institutional model/type (Birnbaum, 1988; Kezar & Kinzie, 2006; Tierney,

1988). Although the institutional model/type might not communicate the core values of the institution's mission, it plays a role in representing distinctive purposes and affects institutional operations. Most importantly for this study, an institutional model/type that does not include doctoral programs allows for sites that generally have a primary focus on undergraduate outcomes and teaching over doctoral recruitment and research. While limiting the sample to bachelor's degree granting institutions exclusively would have been ideal, only three Jesuit colleges in the U.S. serve undergraduates exclusively. Second, limiting the sample through other methods could have made sites more easily identifiable. For example, selecting the sites geographically would have affected the ability to ensure anonymity of participants and their affiliated institutions, as schools are widely dispersed across the continental U.S.

It is important to note that selected institutions also have similar size/setting and enrollment profile classifications. This was done to provide a general level of consistency in the sites' distribution of full-time equivalent (FTE) students, which is key variable of calculating retention and persistence rates. Additionally, the sites selected for the sample do slightly vary in undergraduate profile, undergraduate instructional program classifications, retention and graduation rates, and ethnic and racial diversity, as highlighted in Table 1; however, these nuances are important variations to consider in terms of institutional context variation and its impact on collaborative practices. For example, these distinctions reflect important organizational priorities with respect to institutional strategic vision, as well as campus climate and organizational culture, which can have implications on infrastructure, services, and resource allocation (Birnbaum, 1988; The Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education, 2018). As I interviewed academic and student affairs officers at the same site and across six Jesuit campuses, the study allowed for an examination of the impact of internal and external factors on individual sites' collaborative practices, as well as the ability to understand similarities

or differences across institutions. To be clear, I did not intend to conduct case studies of the institutions from which interview participants were drawn, but instead focus the level of analysis on the participants themselves and what can be gleaned about their experiences of cross-divisional collaborations, specific of course to Jesuit institutions.

Population for the study. In phenomenological research, the size of the sample is not viewed as a methodological issue since the validity of data is based on the content itself and not on the number of cases examined. Many phenomenological researchers advocate for between five and 10 participants total (Boyd, 2001; Creswell, 1998). However, Englander (2012) noted that a greater number of subjects may provide a better appreciation of the variation of the phenomenon. Therefore, for this study I interviewed three to five staff and faculty members at each of the six selected institutions. This process yielded 11 academic affairs and 11 student affairs participants from six different campuses, totaling 22 participants.

The only constraint on subject selection in phenomenological research is the requirement that the subject has experience with the phenomenon under study (Michalak & Ristino, 2013). Therefore, the study participants were purposefully selected academic officers (i.e., vice provosts, associate, assistant, and full deans), faculty, and student affairs officers (i.e., chief student affairs officers, dean of students, program coordinators, directors, etc.), who were actively serving in retention and persistence programs, committees, or other campus initiatives at Jesuit colleges and universities. Years of experience within functional divisions ranged from 5-30 years. Institutional experience ranged from 1-20 years. For this study, participants were purposefully selected for their knowledge and active participation in their campus' partnership efforts regarding retention and persistence.

I identified interviewees based on a pre-screening done through document review and discussions with key informants in the AJCU network. The use of purposeful sampling was

necessary for this study, as it allowed for the selection of *information-rich* cases of partnerships around the particular issue of retention and persistence (Patton, 1990) and to uncover real-world conditions to fulfill the aims of the study (Palinkas et al., 2015). Moreover, snowball sampling was employed to determine other participants that could be impactful for the study. Snowball sampling uses research participants to identify or recruit others with similar characteristics or knowledge of the phenomenon to participate in the study (Bailey, 1978). Table 2 provides a summary of the 11 student affairs officers and 11 academic affairs officers who participated in this study.

Table 2

Summary of Participants and Sites

Site Pseudonym	Participant Pseudonym (SA)	Participant Pseudonym (AA)	Approximate Site Faculty*	Approximate Site Staff*
Apostle University	Leigh, Mike	Merry, Richard, Sarah	800	900
Arrupe University	Cynthia, Eliza	Renee	1,000	900
Examen University	Lisa	Jessica, Shannon, Jonathan	700	600
Francis University	Keith, Matt	Carmen, Mary Ann	500	500
Ignatian University	Holly, Michelle	Tony	700	600
Magis University	Kathy, Marco	Sandra	500	700

*Data collected from sites websites and available Institutional Research data. Data includes FT and PT employees' statuses.

Access and participant recruitment. Based on my analysis and study criteria, approximately 60 individuals across the six identified institutions were eligible participants. To access these participants, I used a combination of outreach including contacting chief executive and academic officers across the AJCU network and asking that they send letters of support for the study to encourage participation and directly emailing or calling individuals I had identified as strong candidates. Through these outreach efforts, I disclosed to the potential study participants that I am an Assistant Dean at a Jesuit institution, and my motivation for studying their sites was to gain knowledge to inform my work as a practitioner and also to increase research on the topic of academic and student affairs collaborations.

The outreach yielded three to five academic and student affairs professionals from each of the six institutions that demonstrated interest in participating my study. This produced 22 interviews at six Jesuit institutions (classified as Master's Colleges & Universities) across the U.S. Interview participants expressed genuine interest in my study and were hopeful that the findings could add knowledge about collaborative academic-student affairs processes in higher education, specifically focused on assisting with improving student outcomes at Jesuit colleges and universities.

Data collection strategies. Two qualitative methods of data collection were employed for this study: semi-structured interviews and document analysis. The primary source of data collected was semi-structured interviews. Both sources of data were pertinent to all of the study's research questions.

Semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews elicited an understanding of how collaborative processes focused on undergraduate retention and persistence are developed, implemented, and sustained at Jesuit universities. In a semi-structured interview, the researcher provides some structure based on his/her research interests and interview protocol but works flexibly within the parameters of the protocol and allows room for the respondents' more spontaneous descriptions and narratives (Brinkmann, 2014). Interviews also provided data on research questions focusing on cultural or structural supports and barriers, methods that institutions use to evaluate success of collaborative retention efforts, and mission alignment to collaborative practices. Thematic analysis of interviews was used to identify, analyze, and report themes within these data (Maxwell, 2012). Interviews took place in person at the university sites

and by phone from December 2017-February 2018⁴. Ten interviews were completed in person and 12 were done via phone.

To ensure confidentiality, the interviews were held in offices selected by the participant. These interviews ranged between 60-90 minutes per participant. Interviews were recorded using an iPhone, with a handheld audio recorder as a backup device. It is essential to phenomenological analysis that the interviews be tape recorded and transcribed to ensure that the exact words of the interviewee are captured and portrayed accurately. I listened to each interview within 24 hours and then immediately sent out for transcription (using Rev.com). Based on the phenomenological methodology for this study, notes were not taken during the interview as they restricted the interviewer's ability to systematically probe without distraction. Furthermore, note taking involves some reinterpretation of data by the researcher, which can hinder the phenomenological analysis process (Sanders, 1982). After the interviews were transcribed, I read each transcript while listening to the audio to ensure no errors had been made. Audio recordings were kept on a secure external hard drive. Interview transcripts were stored in a secure and locked filing cabinet and subjects were assigned pseudonyms.

Document analysis. In order to understand how participants' experiences and perceptions aligned with institutional mission and collaboration, documents were examined as a secondary data source. These documents provided a collection of objectives from different departments and divisions and added a unique vantage point for examining institutions' methods for coordination and collaboration; emphasis and alignment of values, mission, and priorities; and established procedures for planning and achieving goals. Reviewing these documents also provided an opportunity to examine external and internal factors or trends impacting the campus environment

⁴ In-person interviews were conducted at three of the six sites.

or institutional priorities (Burkhart & Reuss, 1993). As I explored collaborations through the theoretical lens of organizational culture, structure, and open systems, institutional documents acted as a valuable tool to analyze the phenomenon of collaboration through institutional artifacts (Schein, 2010).

Document analysis was also used to track types of collaborative retention initiatives at each interviewee's site. This process helped provide a methodological blueprint of the development, implementation, and assessment of these collaborative practices. Analyzed documents included any information relevant to existing partnership initiatives, such as web pages, planning documents, job descriptions, meeting notes, annual reports, retention reports, strategic plans, and assessment data (Merriam, 1998). Mostly, I reviewed documents that were available on open access websites including strategic plans, mission statements, task force reports, presentations, and meeting minutes. Additionally, I was allowed to view certain internal and committee documents, at the discretion of the participants in the study. The documents I ultimately used in my analysis and writing efforts conceal the particular institutional identity.

Explication of the data. The term *explication* is borrowed from Hycner (1999), who warned phenomenological researchers to avoid analyzing data as the term alludes to “breaking the data into parts” (p. 161), and therefore runs the risk of losing the ability to examine the whole phenomenon. Explication, in contrast, allows the researcher to avoid interpreting data and instead convey the participants' whole lived experiences in his/her findings as explicitly stated by the respondents. For this study, I used the following steps to review data through explication: (a) examine and articulate my biases around phenomenon of academic and student affairs collaborations, (b) read through transcripts to gain a foundation of experiences, (c) identify key themes and issues in data, (d) aggregate and organize with the aid of Microsoft Excel tools and thematic mapping, and (e) produce a list of themes that summarizes what the participants were

saying about the phenomenon given their experiences and examine these themes for the study findings.

First, I reviewed and thematically coded the interview data once the interview transcripts were checked for errors. Using the phenomenological framework as a roadmap to explicate transcripts, I aggregated and related data when relationships were apparent in my findings. To execute this process, the verbatim interview responses were deconstructed to identify units of meaning to provide an in-depth understanding of the perceptions, thoughts, and meanings the subjects ascribed to the phenomenon (Hycner, 1985). I coded these data based on subcategories developed for each research question. As Creswell (2014) stated, the best method to examine qualitative data is “to aggregate data into a small number of themes, something like five to seven themes” (p. 245). Similarly, Fielding and Thomas (2008) and Saldaña (2015) recommended that thematic coding can suggest a direction of a particular process or phenomenon. As Butler-Kisber (2010) advised, the phenomenological data analysis process should use themes from literature and also be constructed through significant indications from the data per participants’ direct statements. The researcher should *formulate meanings* through their interpretations of the data and create thematic clusters to write about if they are presented in the data.

For my study, I first, developed deductive data categories related to the conceptual and theoretical framework. Therefore, the foundational themes included the following: (a) organizational factors (e.g., structural and cultural), (b) individual factors; and (c) external factors. Additional themes were added based on interview responses in a manner more reflective of inductive data analytic processes. To code, I used Quirkos and a Microsoft Excel file, highlighting statements that fell into subcategory buckets. Once all the interviews were coded by category, summary findings were analyzed to evaluate and determine shared themes, patterns, and differences within single sites and across all locations.

Appendix A outlines the interview protocol used for this study. The protocol was developed using a phenomenological approach, which encourages few grand tour questions, but allows for in-depth probing to draw out individual nuances in perception or experiences (Morgan & Smircich, 1980; Sanders, 1982). Creswell (2007) noted that researchers using a phenomenological approach as outlined by Moustakas (1994) should include two general concepts in their interview protocol: (a) What have you experienced in terms of the phenomenon (in this case academic and student affairs collaborations for student persistence)? and (b) What contexts or situations have typically influenced or affected your experiences of the phenomenon? Other open-ended questions should follow these questions that specifically pertain to the research questions and researcher's "abiding concern" for the phenomenon (Van Manen, 1990, p. 31). The interview protocol was piloted by interviewing two higher education professionals in similar positions as those who will be interviewed for the study. The pilot test occurred in August 2017 prior to IRB approval. The pilot test was recorded, transcribed, and coded in the same manner as the final study to test for potential issues.

Document analysis was used to observe any conflicting or corroborating data and to track processes from the six institutions from which subjects were drawn for the interviews. I created a memo for each document reviewed. The memo summarized the document and highlighted any relevant information that aligned or corroborated with my research questions, or statements made by interviewees. This method triangulated data sources. Documents were printed and e-filed in a private Google drive (or uploaded as a PDF if available). These documents provided data on the collaboration process (development through implementation), the mission and vision statements informing the collaborations, reasons for developing collaborations, and how members were selected for the particular collaboration at each site. Content analysis was important to triangulate and corroborate information provided in interviews regarding types and frequencies

of collaborative retention initiatives. Thematic document analysis was used to corroborate interview data on mission alignment to collaborative practices.

Role management and ethical issues. As an Assistant Dean at a Jesuit institution, I have a vested interest in gaining knowledge about the factors affecting the development of collaborations, and how to facilitate successful and sustainable academic and student affairs partnerships to improve student outcomes. In speaking to stakeholders at AJCU institutions, there was the possibility of wariness that I would use the information I have acquired to make certain institutions look better or more desirable to external stakeholders. This is a concern that I addressed up front with study participants, stressing the importance of this study for all AJCU institutions to make strides to improve collaborative processes. Moreover, their potential concerns were mitigated as I concealed the identity of the institutions from which I interviewed staff and faculty. The purpose of this study was not to criticize or identify failures in the collaborative process. Instead, my goal was to provide recommendations about methods to foster environments where collaborations can be successful, identify any factors that could be roadblocks to collaboration, investigate positive influences on the collaborative process, and evaluate how mission affects collaborative practices. Because of this, I did not engage in a case study or site-specific study design, as it would have been difficult to sustain anonymity of participants or the sites. My findings help improve current processes, and that is how the study was presented to the study's internal and external stakeholders. All participants and their institutions' identities remained confidential throughout the study; therefore, presenting the findings externally does not create ethical issues.

There are several ethical issues that I needed to consider in order for my study to be successful. All study participants were made aware of the intent, methods, and purpose of the study. I maintained participant anonymity by using pseudonyms for interviewees. Interviewees'

work sites were not disclosed at any point in the study; therefore, identifying individuals would be difficult (although not impossible). The participants consented to participating in interviews either verbally or via signed forms. Participants were told that they could end their participation in the study at any time without consequence. Additionally, I am not a direct supervisor of any of the study participants, nor do I have any authority to affect their job security, even if interviewees from my work site participated. Files that contain names of participants were stored on a password protected external hard drive, and then deleted once the transcripts were transcribed and coded.

Credibility/trustworthiness. A threat to the credibility of my study is that it is not generalizable to all collaborations relating to undergraduate persistence. As I investigated a particular type of collaboration between academic and student affairs officers, the findings are not generalizable to any and all types of retention-focused efforts. However, as I interviewed academic and student affairs officers across six institutions, the results from this study could provide comparisons of collaborative practices on a broad scale. Triangulation of interview data assisted with corroborating my findings, as they are not restricted to particular campus sites or participants. This helped to ensure that an identified theme or pattern was occurring at multiple sites, was discussed by a majority of participants, and did not exist exclusively at one campus site.

Another issue considered was reactivity and individuals expressing only positivity about the collaborative process to ensure their institutions were presented in a positive light. Given my attention to role management, individuals felt that they could trust my motivation for conducting the study. I am aware that the extent to which interviewees trusted the anonymity of the interview had a great bearing on how candid and honest they were during the study. To assist

with this concern, I used triangulation of interview data from interviewees to make sites and participants difficult to identify in my findings.

As mentioned in the Role Management section, my bias about academic and student affairs collaborations and the factors affecting their development had the potential to skew my findings to align with my preexisting theories. To mitigate this concern, I utilized direct quotes from interviews and documents to confirm or contradict my biases or theories about the collaborative process. As a form of member checking, I shared transcribed interviews with the respective interview participant to assure that their transcripts were accurate. I also gave them the opportunity to add additional comments or clarification relative to any points in the transcript. Any additional commentary was attached to the back of the initial transcript file and was treated as additional data. As a supplementary form of member checking, I shared my preliminary interpretations with a few research participants to ensure trustworthiness in my findings. Lincoln and Guba (1985) posited that member checking is a crucial trustworthiness technique for establishing the validity of an account and researcher credibility. This process not only provides an opportunity for participants to correct errors or challenge misinterpretations, but also allows for the volunteering of additional information to be generated from the reflective process. Member checking is in alignment with the principles of the phenomenological approach of data explication. Furthermore, I used the phenomenological techniques of epoche and bracketing to disclose my bias and restrict its influence over the data collection and review. Finally, per the fundamentals of phenomenological methodology, thematic codes were generated from the interview content and supported by themes described in extant organizational theory scholarship and established student success literature.

Summary

There has been increasing recognition within higher education regarding the importance of collaboration among student affairs and academic affairs to organizational missions and goals regarding undergraduate student retention (Kezar & Lester, 2009). Collaboration seems to be an intuitively positive idea, but it is important for higher education stakeholders to understand that no matter the compelling logic, systematic barriers and challenges innate to higher education can be the impetus for collaborations failing. In contrast, the unique cultural and structural complexities of higher education can be harnessed to support, develop, implement, and sustain successful cross-functional collaborations. Therefore, the goal of this study was to add to the research regarding the factors impacting collaboration between student affairs and academic affairs focused on undergraduate retention specifically at Jesuit universities. Chapter IV will describe the findings from collected data.

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

This study explored how student and academic affairs officers understand and experience cross-functional collaborations focused on undergraduate student persistence in the Jesuit university setting. The study arose because of the sparse empirical evidence explaining this phenomenon. I also have a professional commitment to enhancing the collaborative infrastructure within higher education institutions to improve student success. For these reasons, I wanted to investigate the perceptions of participants in actual and seemingly successful collaborations. The results are a synthesis of student and academic affairs officers' impressions from twenty-two semi-structured interviews (11 student affairs and 11 academic affairs) from six Jesuit universities. Using the organizational frameworks of culture, structure, and open systems, my findings contextualize internal and external institutional dynamics: Participants detail the perceived influence these dynamics have on the development and sustainability of cross-divisional collaborations for student persistence.

Chapter IV presents the study's findings in five parts. The phenomenon of collaboration is complex, especially when it is embedded in a dynamic organizational environment such as a higher education institution. Therefore, each section of this chapter presents this phenomenon through different perspectives: organizationally, individually, externally, and through study participants. This division is meant to help the reader negotiate the interdependence and intersectionality of organizational and interpersonal factors that collectively make up the phenomenon under investigation.

I start by exploring the emergent findings that relate to participants' understanding of the structural make-up, processes, and purpose of the collaborations in which they are actively involved at their institutions. In this section, I present themes related to the unique approaches and purposes for developing these collaborative engagements, how the collaborations are

structured, and the processes and evaluation of outcomes taking place in the partnerships. In section two, I examine the perceived organizational factors that affect these partnerships. Although participants are employed at six different institutions, grouping themes by organizational factors allowed me to examine differences and similarities in the ways that actors made sense of their institutional environment. I divided organizational factors into two sub-categories: cultural complexities and structural complexities. Themes related to cultural complexities include the organization's alignment with the Jesuit mission and academic and student affairs professional identities, norms, and values associated with professional subdivisions (academic versus administrative cultures). Themes related to structural complexities included institution size, resources, institutional transition, leadership support, reporting hierarchies and accountability systems, and loose-coupling/decentralization.

Participants' professional identities aligned with student or academic affairs; however, participants from both divisions noted universal characteristics of individuals that transcended professional subcultures and were valuable in building a strong foundation for collaborating cross-divisionally. Therefore, section three discusses the individual skills, attitudes, and values that participants identify as essential attributes, such as cultivating trust and mutual respect, ability to act as collaborative champions across divisions, and ability to dialogue and compromise.

Section four presents the prominent external pressures that permeate the organization as an open system and their effect on creating partnerships that are specifically developed to improve student success. Participants discussed several factors that they feel have varying degrees of influence on collaborations: changes in the types of students attending Jesuit schools and their support needs, board members, government compliance, national rankings, financial constraints and being tuition dependent, and parental involvement.

The fifth section utilizes the findings from one interview question which asked participants to provide advice or guidance to potential student and academic affairs officers looking to develop successful collaborations focused on student persistence and success. Their responses are offered as a representation of their professional identities and lived experiences in the hopes of helping to define what is necessary for successful collaboration. Direct guidance from collaborators provides a vital understanding of the implications for practice. Finally, I conclude this chapter with a summary of the findings in each section.

Section I: Structures, Processes, Purposes, and Evaluations

In this section, I present themes related to the examined collaborations' structures, processes, purposes, and methods of evaluation.

Configurations and structures for collaborations. Participants identified themselves as being members of different types of established cross-divisional collaborations focused on student success and persistence at their campuses. Kezar and Lester (2009) defined these configurations as “integrating structures” (p. 123) that bring together an idea (mission, vision, values) and the people (network). They create a structure: a defined collaborative unit of people who work together on an institutional priority in a visible, tangible, and concrete way. These partnerships had different names, formations, and compositions at each site. However, based on interviews and document analysis, I grouped the partnerships into the four general configurations (Table 3), including the sites where participants were engaged in these collaborations.

Table 3

Types of Collaborations

Partnership Type	Partnership Aims	Sites
University Retention Committees	Focus on evaluating university retention and persistence at a high-level. Committees create strategic plans and set institutional goals about retention. Most provided recommendations to leadership or divisions about how to implement. Most committees divided up into more tactical sub-groups around particular retention topics.	Apostle University Arrupe University Francis University Ignatian University Magis University
Student Success Intervention Teams	Partnerships were described as “On the ground” or “tactical teams” that worked together to support and create action plans for individual students who have been identified by the community as being “at-risk” of not persisting.	Apostle University Arrupe University Examen University Francis University Ignatian University
First-Year Programming	Curricular/ co-curricular collaborations where academics and student affairs create programs or courses with the aim of student success. Partnerships also had additional learning outcomes for students that were not directly linked to persistence but did reinforce student self-discovery and engagement.	Arrupe University Examen University Magis University
Student Success Initiatives/ Persistence Special Projects	Partnerships oriented around initiatives that focused on improving student persistence and success. Included long-term planning committees or working groups that are identifying ways to build infrastructure around student success and persistence concerns such as student advising, success coaching, tutoring, resilience programs, etc.	Apostle University Examen University Francis University Magis University

Either in interviews or through document analysis, all six campuses noted that more than one collaboration type happened simultaneously. Participants’ membership overlapped in a few of the partnerships based on participants’ position/role at the institution. As most participants had been at their current institutions for many years, they referred to their involvement in these collaborations in their current form and also discussed the different iterations of these partnerships. Participants noted that collaborations changed based on new leadership directives, campus feedback, and evolving institutional or student needs. Fifteen participants noted the importance of these partnerships’ flexibility to reorganize and adjust given the changing

organizational dynamics. Marco, a student affairs officer, spoke for many, stating, “Every step of the way, we collect feedback to evolve how we structure the program.” Six participants also articulated that these collaborations created more clarity and reduced confusion throughout campus about student needs or student success initiatives. It also helped formalize roles and responsibilities around student persistence. Shannon, an academic affairs officer, discussed how the creation of integrated structures provided clarity at her institution:

It helps us to have a greater understanding of how we all fit into the university space, and how we fit into the student experience.... Without coordination, we sometimes duplicate each other unintentionally. So, understanding of our roles...allows us to make sure we are not stepping on or over each other.

Another finding focused on how these collaborations were established, with participants providing a range of responses. Some were developed as mere reaction. In these cases, the impetus came out of a crisis on campus or at another university like Virginia Tech. The focus was on keeping students safe or improving academic success when “numbers dipped” for retention or graduation. Others mentioned directives from leadership or institutional transitions. With those changes, different action plans for the campus were developed that required more collaboration to achieve established goals and outcomes. Some initiatives were explained as proactive or grassroots oriented. These were based on faculty and staff desire to work together to increase university efficiency. Eight participants from different campuses noted that these collaborations helped student and academic affairs identify “gaps,” “silos,” or “blind spots.”

Additionally, collaborations identified duplicated or ineffective efforts across campus. Participants noted that collaborating “helps us put the fuller picture of the student together and mak[e] sure that they are getting connected to the right person.” Jessica emphasized the importance of “recognizing that we don’t have the same skill set.” However, regardless of the original purpose for establishing and implementing the partnership, participants noted either

explicitly or implicitly that their reasons for being involved stemmed from a desire to improve the student experience, help students be more successful as “whole people.”

In addition to diverse reasons for establishment, configurations, and aims, these groups differed in their meeting frequency and leadership models. Based on the type of partnership and goals for the group, meeting frequency fell on a spectrum from high levels of in-person interactions for more tactical intervention teams (daily to weekly) to less frequent interactions or formal meetings (bi-weekly, monthly, or once a semester) for programming, committees, or special project teams. For example, participants from Examen University noted that it was “an extremely effective structure” for the aims of their student intervention collaborative to have set weekly meetings, as they were dealing with time-sensitive and difficult student issues. Lisa, a student affairs officer, elaborated: “This is hard work. This is an hour and a half every week talking about some of the most challenging kinds of circumstances that our students are experiencing.” Other schools such as Arrupe University, convened their larger retention committee a few times a semester, but had “developed topical subcommittees that met more frequently to work on developing recommendations...initiatives for the larger group to evaluate.”

Whereas the leadership configurations collaborations varied, over half of participants valued the partnership being led by a skilled convener. Skilled conveners were identified as individuals who had “institutional and cultural capital,” “positional power,” “referent relationship power,” “institutional knowledge,” and experience working on other committees, which helped promote the work of the collaboration to the necessary channels on campus and create buy-in. Participants also found it important for leaders to set clear goals, outcomes, and agendas for the group to maintain efficiency.

Another finding focused on having the appropriate cross-section of members from necessary divisions. Fourteen participants mentioned that having the right combination of people from the campus in the room, based on their professional expertise, was essential to reducing partnership redundancy and increasing efficiency when making decisions or recommendations. Existing research corroborates this finding by noting that creating collaborations that have members with the needed expertise to problem solve an issue allows for “cognitive complexity” (Kezar & Lester, 2009, p. 11). Cognitive complexity is a perspective on a problem or issue with nuanced solutions that represent multiple perspectives. In particular, cross-divisional teams demonstrated that having individuals who represent different types of expertise enhances the number of perspectives offered and develops a complex picture, analysis, and resultant solution (Benisimon & Neumann, 1993; Googins & Rochlin, 2000). Although this study interviewed student and academic affairs officers, many of the collaborations they were involved in included campus members outside of their divisions including Enrollment Management, Career Services, Institutional Research, Financial Aid, Public Safety, and the Registrar.

Merry, an academic affairs officer, recapitulated sentiments from other participants by noting the importance of having the right people in the room as it created an environment of “leadership and followership” or situational leadership, which allows the group to ‘pick up on everybody’s expertise” to facilitate student success. Mary Ann, an academic affairs officer, elaborated on how critical this “interdisciplinary component” was for her partnership. It allowed the group to identify potential gaps in how the different divisions were addressing complex students’ needs “because we’re all evaluating the data, but we’re also identifying which office or staff member may be the most appropriate to provide the outreach to the student.” Eliza, a student affairs officer, praised this type of group as “probably one of the best collaborations I’ve seen.” The expertise and lived experiences of academics and student affairs officers could be

leveraged to answer difficult questions. In planning support services, she noted, “We finally...took all the areas that needed to come together to work on retention and persistence, and we can spend time asking important questions.”

Moreover, participants felt that it was not only essential to have the appropriate cross-section of people based on expertise, but also, they needed individuals who had varying perspectives and approaches to solving problems. Matt, a student affairs officer, noted that collaborations must “challenge themselves to bring people to the table whom you believe is not necessarily going to agree with what you want to do...they bring alternative solutions or examples of a way of proceeding to the table.” Although nearly all the participants noted the importance of having a representative cross-section of partners, they emphasized that it needs to be the “right size” based on the goals of the group. Many mentioned that, at times, the group’s size seemed to get too large and needed to be adjusted to ensure efficiency and productivity. Many participants noted that their partnerships “evolved in figuring out whom the right people to have at the table,” as well as ensuring that not too many were involved in the collaboration.

An interesting finding regarding representation was that non-administrative positioned faculty (not holding an administrative position like Dean, Associate Dean, Assistant Dean, or Chair) were generally underrepresented in the conversation around persistence. This affected the ability to have a diversity of representation when discussing a campus-wide issue like student success. Keith, a student affairs officer, noted that there was only one non-administrator faculty on their retention committee, and he thought “having a little bit more academic involvement, would help us understand better what is happening in the classroom.” Matt, a student affairs officer, mentioned that in his experience, faculty committees and administrative committees remained in silos with little overlap in representation. He noted, “You’ve got these two circles...but the overlap area is minimal. A lot of that has to do with internal structures and

dynamics that are created within the university.” Participants also noted that if a faculty member was included, they was seen as either representing all faculty members, or just bringing their own perspective. Jonathan, an academic affairs officer, corroborated Matt’s insight and expressed that even though he was in an administrative role, based on his lived experience as a tenured faculty member, he was able to provide unique insight into the collaboration and could use his power as a tenured faculty to be a voice for the committee to higher leadership. Jonathan often felt:

compelled to have to go ahead and put forward a view from the standpoint of a college professor...fewer professors are in these types of roles or on committees. Being tenured gives me a sense of power and ability to speak what I want to speak.

Participants had diverse experiences regarding faculty members’ attitudes towards involvement with student success collaborations. However, they generally discussed that faculty fall into five groups: (a) engaged and personally motivated, (b) potentially interested but over-committed with other responsibilities and inconsistently involved due to time and service constraints, (c) no interest in engagement and focused on other work, (d) generally not engaged with university life, and (e) not on the radar for service engagements due to faculty status. The second group of faculty being the most frequently referenced by participants. In addition, participants touched upon organizational constraints (e.g., limited resources to compensate faculty, merit reviews linking to involvement, lack of department-level goals for retention and graduation to incentivize faculty accountability) that limited the ability for non-administrative faculty to be involved. Many participants described that in their experiences, it was difficult to get faculty committed to programs or committees because of a lack of interest, a lack of time, or because they are not appropriately compensated for the additional role. Sarah suggested, “It would be great to be able to expand the reward system...get more faculty involved who would then see the benefits of doing it outside of just, it’s a part of their job.” Overall, participants felt

strongly that faculty play a critical role in shaping the student experience, and they felt they were being underleveraged as collaborators in student success strategy.

Collaboration processes. While the structure of the partnerships examined in this study varied quite a bit, processes of the collaborations seemed aligned across sites. Nineteen participants noted that a key element to supporting their collaborative process was their high usage of data and technology to assist with identifying goals, retention trends, and outcomes. Most participants spoke about their institutions moving away from anecdotal evidence about persistence and success trends and toward using “systematically tracked data” (both quantitative and qualitative) to make “data-informed” decisions about student’s challenges regarding success and persistence. Mary Ann (academic affairs) noted the importance of data to benchmark collaborative outcomes, as retention success indicators can be volatile. She noted that the data the collaboration was collecting “validates some of the trends that anecdotally we’re all talking about” but haven’t actually been able to prove. Others noted that their partnerships allowed for “the mining of the data which found pockets of low hanging fruit for action, that simply were not being systematically addressed.”

All sites used either a purchased or in-house developed persistence systems (or some combination) to track and collect data points on students from campus constituents. This was used in combination with persistence and census data modeled by institutional research and other survey data. Jonathan (academic affairs) stated that having a well-developed data collection system was a “huge game-changer to help students in real time and handle the various challenges that they have before it’s too late.” Many noted that these data systems are set up to collect data regarding student concerns from both academic and student affairs stakeholders. The data are then disseminated by the collaboration to ensure students receive help in a timely fashion.

The majority of participants mentioned that the technology they use helps them stay aligned with the university mission of *cura personalis* and other strategic priorities. Mike, a student affairs officer, noted,

Our ability to have comprehensive data through the system we have is wonderful because it's giving us so much more detail, and you know, in Jesuit language, a more holistic view or complete picture of a student or alignment with *cura personalis*.

Cynthia, a student affairs officer, added that having a system to track student data also helps to support university-wide research on retention. She noted, "It's been incredible to me to see the interest, the enthusiasm, the synergy around this data collection."

Although systems for aggregating and analyzing data were heavily utilized, six participants (two from the same site) cautioned about their experiences with too many systems being implemented to track data and the potential adverse ramifications it can cause. This included different divisions sending out individual exit and student satisfaction surveys, different campus referral pathways, or creating in-house data tracking and note-taking systems that were redundant and not integrated into the already established university system. For example, Lisa, a student affairs officer, noted that different divisions implemented systems to collect student data and record student interactions, and at first, the systems did not speak to each other. She discussed that one of the "big concerns was that the systems don't undermine all the work that we've done to promote our student report system."

Twelve participants noted that while having comprehensive data or tracking systems was valuable, the real benefit was that they could analyze it together as part of their collaborative processes. Renee, an academic affairs officer, elaborated that:

having a committee that can ask good questions about the data and analyze effectively means we are all looking at the same data. Otherwise, you have student and academic affairs, breaking the data into silos between the college and divisions, just looking at their data. You miss the big picture.

Fourteen participants (at least one from each site) mentioned that having a cross-divisional collaboration not only helped with increasing student success, but also created a place where partners identified university policies or procedures that needed to be changed or removed. This was described as an unanticipated bonus of having designated time to work together, discuss problems, design solutions, and either provide recommendations to leadership or take action as a committee. Participants were able to work together on developing policies, writing proposals, and designing programs that involved changes to student refunds, withdrawal deadlines, probation and dismissal, student hold policies, student tutoring and academic resources, and transfer credit articulation. They also created subsequent collaborations from the first partnership to tackle newly identified projects or concerns including a tuition refund committee, registration assistance committee, and student advising task force. For example, the participants from Examen University described how the primary collaboration of which she was a part identified an issue with how the university was reviewing and approving tuition refunds. Using the combined effort of the original partnership, they developed an offshoot cross-divisional collaboration.

Participants discussed the importance of building an infrastructure that supported established processes, to ensure the sustainability of their partnerships. Many noted that their partnership would be enhanced by: formalizing and streamlining the scope of work for the partnership (e.g., student cases being reviewed by the group or re-defining leadership goals around retention based on time and resources) (8), formalizing accountability methods for ensuring work done outside of meeting time is completed (9), collaborations not revolving around certain personnel (14), and moving from informal or “oral histories” to more formalized processes and “documented transition reports” (7). Regarding improvements to accountability, all participants noted that there was some level of expectation to “report” about completed or in-

progress tasks to the group or leadership teams at subsequent meetings or in the form of official written progress documents. Participants expressed that “reporting out” was done to provide an infrastructure of accountability within the group, the campus community, and leadership.

However, the study found a difference between how academic and student affairs officers felt about how well accountability was working. Over half of the student affairs participants commented that it was difficult for student affairs officers to hold academics partners accountable for tasks. Participants who vocalized these concerns said that, in some cases, they felt frustrated about academic partners’ follow through, and this had the potential to affect the group’s ability to accomplish goals and create tension within the group. Mike (student affairs) addressed this concern when asked about the efficiency level of the partnership’s structure by stating, “It could be better most specifically around individuals and their follow-up responsibilities. I think we’re trying to hold people more accountable for following up when they say they’re going to follow up with a student.” He provided a recent example where a student follow-up was assigned to an associate dean and 3 weeks later, the follow-up was still not done. Mike noted, “That can be frustrating.”

Purposes of collaborations. The second part of the study’s primary research question sought to identify how intra-organizational collaborations in support of student persistence are different from other campus collaborations. I found one main distinction identified by participants involved in these collaborations: a unique purpose that brought members together based on their shared values around student well-being and the university’s Jesuit mission. Eighteen participants identified that there was a “common purpose to help students be successful” and “greater good” associated with being involved in collaborations that had the goal of improving student persistence. Because of this, participants noted that creating buy-in from both divisions seems easier than other collaborations on which they may be working together, or

with other campus departments. Michelle, a student affairs officer, didn't hesitate to say, "It's all about the student. It feels to me like when we are working together towards the same goal, we all want this student to graduate." Keith (student affairs) articulated the differences he saw in two collaborations he was a part of:

The carrot then is that people see the fruits of their labor born out in the evolving student outcomes based on the work of the retention committee. You are trying to make students thrive and succeed, whether you teach, whether you support. . . . On the flipside, you go into another meeting [faculty salary negotiations] where we are advocating for ourselves, completely different dynamic. You can call it collaborative...but the dynamic is much different because the focus isn't on the student and their success.

Most participants believed the shared vision for student success coupled with the alignment of the Jesuit mission was helpful in reducing professional territoriality and tensions or organizational silos.

In addition to the unique foundational purpose of the collaboration, 11 participants noted that there was a higher level of trust developed between collaborators due to the challenging and impactful nature of much of the work they do together. Most participants explained that collaborators connected to persistence have a shared respect for the students' "sacred stories." Mike (student affairs) explained, "You're going to get to these stories where it fosters a sense of wow, we're changing lives if we can do this right in a student's case. And I do think that's different from other collaborations."

Although participants identified that shared purpose and trust provided some unity within collaborations, eight participants also noted that "what student success looks like" or "how it is achieved" may look different as an academic or student life officer. Shannon (academic affairs) articulated this concern by stating, "When we get together we talk about student engagement or experience, what we would define as a successful student, (and) we start talking about different types of students, and what they're needs are...based on our professional orientations and

values.” Most participants noted that they had to have challenging conversations to try to find a consensus on how to help students based on different views about what “academic success” is.

Participants’ evaluation of successful collaboration. One of the research questions of this study sought to examine was how collaborators evaluate the success of collaborative retention efforts. Although I did not find a consistent way that participants evaluate success across all sites, participants mostly described measuring outcomes based on students’ retention and persistence metrics and algorithms. What I found interesting is that many participants did not have a metrics for “measuring” success of the collaboration outside of sheer outcome numbers based on “top-down university retention goals,” However, they could describe ways in which they evaluate or assess the success of their collaborative processes and outcomes. Twelve participants noted that they would evaluate the partnership as successful based on campus interaction and buy-in to the collaboration. This was evaluated based on the level of campus buy-in for working with the collaboration. For example, Eliza (student affairs) mentioned, “increases in faculty referrals of students who need help indicate the collaboration is working.” Other participants said they “look to leadership to validate” that the collaboration is successful.

Alternatively, eight participants evaluated success based on anecdotal evidence from students, whether through individual student success stories or students acknowledging a “seamless kind of experience where they just know that faculty and administrators work together to help them transition and succeed.” Additionally, I found that there is a unique view of evaluating success in regard to retaining students across the six sites, based on the Jesuit mission. Thirteen participants stated that a benchmark of success is based on their ability to help students decide if staying at their institution is the right choice and “to walk with them through that tension and that conversation.” Participants noted that they perceive their goal is not to just retain students, but to help navigate them to other places if their institution did not meet their needs.

This was noted to be done based on an aligned with Jesuit practices of discernment and cura personalis. Three collaborations also used retreats as a way for collaborators to provide feedback, reflect, and evaluate their success.

There was a consensus that measuring improvement in student persistence is difficult and complicated due to the many factors and variables involved. Most note that retention is a “moving target” and there is no “silver bullet” or “magic pill” that can solve the volatility of all student success issues.

Although participants noted that partnering is time consuming and at times ambiguous, overall, participants felt that their involvement in these partnerships were highly meaningful. Not just to move the needle on individual student’s success or to help in their daily work, but to promote the overall health of their institutions moving forward. Sandra (academic affairs) encapsulated participants’ sentiments about this finding:

The old model of having silos...students in the classroom, faculty just doing that...students going to residence halls...student development professionals take over...That’s not who our students are. I don’t think that’s where the field of higher education is, especially Jesuit higher education. It’s not how we are differentiating ourselves...The students don’t make that artificial distinction between the classroom and home. I think for retention, and supporting our students holistically, it’s essential that we have these collaborations, or our institution will be at risk for not achieving its goals.

Section II: Organizational Influences

As the literature outlined in Chapter II identified, collaborators must navigate and negotiate complex cultural and structural organizational factors when creating, implementing, and sustaining collaborations. This study sought to add to existing literature by investigating to what extent cultural norms and how Jesuit institutions are organized contribute to the success of the collaborations. The findings that follow discuss the organizational factors that participants identified as influential to supporting or inhibiting collaboration. First, I present findings that discuss the effects of organizational cultural complexities on partnerships. Next, I will discuss

some perceived structural complexities impacting collaborations based on how the institutions in my study are organized.

Cultural complexities. In this section, I highlight two aspects of cultural complexities: (a) academic and administrative cultures and (b) mission alignment.

Academic and administrative cultures. Much has been written about the conflict between academic and administrative cultures within higher education, and the challenges that arise when bringing disparate stakeholders together to achieve a common goal (Kezar & Lester, 2009). These professional identities and the values and norms that align with those affiliations are longstanding and difficult to overcome. Along these lines, I found that 21 of my participants acknowledged, accepted, and for the most part, embraced the cultural differences between the two divisions. Also, they were able to point to examples or lived experiences where they witnessed or felt the “socially constructed” chasm between student and academic affairs. More than half of participants referred to noting a “language barrier” (12) between the professional groups; issues of territoriality around professional roles/identities in regards to academic content, grading and academic rigor, or offering courses (13); or not fully understanding the scope and role of either’s positions (15) leading to “misconceptions,” “assumptions,” and “stereotypes” between the two groups regarding value of the roles and responsibilities they bring to the academic enterprise. Kathy, a student affairs officer, provided an example of a time she experienced the language barrier with academics, and described the shared language she has within her own professional culture:

I think with these cross-divisional collaborations, particularly academic affairs, we have a language barrier. For example, we discussed changes to our collaboration around our freshman seminar. To me, that meant something different than it did to the faculty. They meant a class that was just about “Moby Dick,” I meant a class about college transition. That can cause some frustration and slow down the process.

However, even with those experiences, most felt that the potential for these divergent cultures to derail collaboration usually occurred if a “disinterested faculty needed to be involved.” Many participants noted that non-engaged faculty are usually in the minority on their campuses. Participants noted that it is difficult to collaborate with academics when they feel a “lack of respect of their time or expertise” or that their “expertise not valued equally,” which lead to “feelings of being belittled.” Specifically, some student affairs participants noted that they had experienced feeling like a “second-class citizen” compared to academics. Many noted that student affairs officers are limited to the governance appointments they can have or the types of university academic events they can attend based on their staff status. However, most felt that in specific contexts such as collaborations to improve student persistence, mutual respect around professional expertise was obtainable. Eleven participants discussed that “owning” their professional identities were a good way to create clear roles around student success initiatives, and 15 participants felt that “respecting” and “understanding” professional identities and norms was an important component of building collaborative relationships. Kathy (student affairs) noted that in her collaboration with a faculty member, whose discipline is writing, they have both learned to “deeply value each other’s expertise” which has “fostered mutual respect and trust.” She provided an example:

I think the first time a minor student issues came up, and I handled it, and she saw that. She pulled me aside and said, “Thank you so much, that was great.” To me, it didn’t seem to be noteworthy, but I recognized that those weren’t conversations that she’s had with people before.... that foundational level of respect as educators, that’s what allows the partnership to function even within these professional roles or cultures we construct.

An interesting finding was that both academic and student affairs participants corroborated what Kathy expressed; on the whole, academics are trying to understand the role student affairs plays within the institution. Keith (student affairs) elaborated:

I think many academics are interested in what we have to say about what affects retention...resiliency, wellness, and student development. The vast majority of our professors want to understand the lived experience outside the classroom. They want to understand student affairs and have an appreciation for the complexity of our work. Student affairs folks are also trying to understand not only what happens in the classroom and what the academic life is like for our students.

Overall, my findings show that even with these cultural differences, participants felt that their campuses were oriented toward being collaborative and that it was possible to identify individuals to collaborate with from both sides.

The existence of academic and administrative cultures was not noted as less persuasive at these institutions. However, my study found that participants perceived cultural differences as less influential to inhibiting the creation of these specific cross-functional collaborations around student persistence than some other factors. There are a few unique reasons why, as compared to participants in other research, the participants in my study might perceive it is easier to navigate cultural complexities (Arcelus, 2008; Engstrom & Tinto, 2000; Perez, 2016). All of the academic partners interviewed for this study involved were in administrative roles. Therefore, most of the cultural differences customarily associated with faculty or academic culture were not as apparent when creating these collaborations, as these academics were able to bridge both academic and administrative cultures. Eight of the academic affairs participants vocalized that it was because of their ability to “talk both languages (academic and administrative)” that they were selected to be part of these collaborations or be in administrative positions within the academic division.

Participants from both divisions expressed academic administrators were key to the success of the collaboration as also acted as “conduits to the faculty,” “vocal bridges,” and “translators about student affairs work.” They were invaluable in disseminating important information about the collaboration, articulating value to the work being done, or providing avenues for additional partnerships between student and academic affairs. As Renee (academic

affairs) articulated, as an academic dean she can, “translate between the divisions, whether it is a language barrier, a process barrier, the hierarchy barrier, especially when we go across on a hot-button issue.” Additionally, a unique finding was that 11 of the participants expressed that they felt intimately connected to their academic or student affairs counterparts, based on having professional experience in that division or having family who worked in the other unit. They felt their “lived experiences provided them with a unique approach to collaborating cross-functionally,” as they understood organizational dynamics from the counter-culture perspective. Participants voiced that their enhanced perspective made them stronger partners. This was not an intended or anticipated finding, but it does provide insight into why creating the collaborations I studied seemed to be more seamless than some presented in the literature. A final reason why collaboration may appear more seamless for these participants is due to their strong commitment to a common purpose around student success that is aligned with the principles of the Jesuit mission. This finding will be discussed further in the next section.

Mission alignment. The most profound finding of the study is the overwhelming consensus regarding the influence that the Jesuit mission had on daily practices, planning, and decision making on an individual and institutional level regarding collaboration. It is also important to note that all participants of the study were lay, and many did not identify as Catholic or even religious. Even so, all participants describe the mission as more than just articulated or espoused; it acts as “a lived philosophy that is embodied in how we approach the work that we do, and how we approach our colleagues.” Merry (academic affairs) explained, “there’s something unique about a Jesuit education. Because of the Jesuit principles and values that are infused into everything we do.” All participants felt that they and their collaborators lived and embodied the Jesuit mission, and therefore they used the charisms to create distinctive approaches to their partnerships. Additionally, all participants felt that the Jesuit mission

provided them with a “foundation,” “a common set of principles,” and “an established benchmark” to “hold each other accountable” and provide a “common language” that acted as a support to creating and sustaining collaborative endeavors around student persistence. Matt (student affairs) expressed that,

The mission gives us a solid backbone. It gives us a purpose and a reason for saying, “This is why we do the things we do for real moral, ethical, and spiritual reasons, beyond just it’s the right thing to do.”

It was interesting to find that even with perceived “language barriers” based on professional identities, orienting collaborations around the Jesuit mission allowed student and academic affairs to find a common culture (identities, purpose, values, and norms) through their commitment to living the mission. Sandra (academic affairs) noted:

It always goes back to the mission. It’s like when people get into those territoriality conversations...we all try to elevate it, and say why are we here? At the end of the day, it’s about *cura personalis*. We’re all here in community to support the students. If we focus on that, then some of the other professional hurt feelings or territory pieces...fall away.

Participants mentioned that although all higher education institutions have an articulated mission, they felt that their commitment to the Jesuit mission, and how campus members incorporated the principles into all aspects of their work was unique. Many of the participants worked or attended non-Jesuit institutions and could identify differences in how influential the mission was to daily work. Jessica (academic affairs) worked at state schools, unaffiliated private schools, and Jesuit schools. She felt that,

There is a difference in the way the work is done here. We always ask what is best for the students or for the group holistically? That thought is put into practice daily. You can’t say that everywhere. I think it’s uniquely mission-oriented and Jesuit.

Having just left a large public institution, Shannon (academic affairs) expressed what many participants noted about the differences in how members of campuses are oriented to the Jesuit mission and their desire to live the mission in everyday practices:

I think this is a special place, because of the Jesuit mission. I think it attracts and retains a certain type of individual...It's a way of educating people, and it's way of interacting with students, with how the curriculum is written, all the things that make a Jesuit institution unique...I think what people outside of Jesuit higher Ed might not understand is we live our mission. *Cura personalis*, men, and women for others, *magis*, those aren't just catchphrases to us...it's an embodiment. For example, my orientation here was about what it means to be at a Jesuit institution, and then what I can do, or how I live that every day. My orientation at a large public school was, this is the history and development of the University system. . . .

It was quite evident that the Jesuit mission not only played a large role in the daily work of participants, but also was personally salient to how they lived their lives and found meaning. Most participants spoke of the mission as a foundational ideology of how they took care of students and each other. The mission of the institution was always “at the forefront of their mind.”

All participants easily identified specific elements of the Jesuit ideology and mission that directly related to approaches to collaborating for student persistence. Six principles were discussed most frequently: *Cura Personalis* (care of the whole person; 22), *In Community* (14), *Men and Women for and With Others* (14), *Discernment and Reflection* (8), *Contemplatives in Action* (6), and *Radical Patience* (4). Additionally, participants used *Cura Personalis*, *In Community*, and *Men and Women for and With Others* as overlapping and intersecting principles in practice. Participants described this principle as “a real sincere commitment in the Ignatian pedagogy of that development of the whole person, that mind-body-soul.” This principle was viewed as “the crux for us and for collaborating to support students.” Most participants who had experience at non-Jesuit schools noted that being “student-centered” was very different from *Cura Personalis* based on the sincere depth of involvement and operationalization around care of students' whole-person development emotionally, physically, and spiritually.

Cura Personalis was discussed as a way to describe the individual student approach of collaborations. Jessica (academic affairs) explained that in the collaborations in which she is

involved, students' situations are reviewed with a Cura Personalis lens to ensure decisions are made in alignment with the mission:

It especially salient when we're making a various decision about student status, it's more than the GPAs. It's more than are they showing up to meetings... It's looking at their history, knowing their context, and determining is this the right place for them to be?

The study found that the Jesuit mission was actualized in the daily practice of the collaboration. Participants provided countless anecdotes about partners coming together seamlessly to support a student or family in crisis. For example, Lisa (student affairs) shared a story about a student who was diagnosed with a brain tumor in his freshman year and how the collaboration in which she participated, handled his situation using Cura Personalis ideology. Through the collaboration, they were able to set up scaffolding of academic and co-curricular supports before and after the student's surgery. To her, getting those resources in place for the student was not going above and beyond, it was what was expected based on the culture and mission of the campus and amongst the people with whom she was collaborated. She noted:

That's just the shared community values around taking care of the whole person. And it's not just you've got surgery tomorrow and good luck, you know, we're going to get you an excuse for your classes, but we're going to make sure you've got the social connection, the academic support, and the spiritual connection, and you're at the game and that you're sharing a meal.

Mike (student affairs) told a moving story about a horrific accident involving students from his campus that resulted in the death of a student. He recounted how the committee to which he belonged took the lead on campus to ensure all students and families impacted needs were met by collaborating across campus. Mike stated,

When you talk about cura personalis for everybody involved and going to the nth degree; I think that is just who we are.... The care goes deeper. That's the culture we have here.... We all believe it and live it.

Participants also noted that the distinctive approaches that embodied "care for the whole person," "Men and Women for and with Others," and being "In Community" were not limited to

their interactions with students. These were fundamental Jesuit principles that grounded their collaborations in humanistic values of care, respect, and compassion for each other. Renee (academic affairs) articulated,

Cura personalis that's about both care for self, care for others and community, and also about accountability. And, so, if that's what we're doing with our students deeply then ostensibly, we're more prepared to come to relationships with our colleagues informed by that and practicing that.

Discernment, Contemplatives in Action, and Radical Patience were addressed frequently when participants discussed interactions between collaborators or the execution of a partnership's processes. Many spoke about taking time to reflect and discern regarding problems the group was facing and then take action through collaborative problem solving. Keith (student affairs) explained his experience moving through these principles in practice when his committee reviews data to make decisions, stating, "The discernment is looking closely at what the information is telling us. The contemplative is the decision-making process. The action is to execute after a period of discernment and assessment." Radical Patience was discussed as an Ignatian philosophy for engaging in the act of partnering by being mindfully patient with the interpersonal dynamics, processes, the speed of change, complexities, and ambiguity that come with collaborating. Participants mentioned that when using this principle, they try to view the collaboration from the other person's perspective and embrace tolerance and adaptability when working together. Marco (student affairs) summarized others' thoughts how Radical Patience influenced collaborating:

Collaborating with different people, with different personalities, and from different divisions on campus.... You need patience, have to be okay with adaptability, and meeting people where they're at in their own skill sets...Looking at it from their perspective. Being sensitive to their needs, and seeing what other pressures are on them that might be causing them to act in a certain way...radical patience helps make it sustainable.

Many participants noted they used a combination of Jesuit ideology—including reflection, discernment, and patience—to navigate potentially tricky situations when working collaboratively.

Collaborators clearly articulated mission alignment as a support for developing, implementing, and sustaining collaborations. However, it is important to note that when participants were asked if they could identify a time when the mission was ignored or not taken into account when a decision was made in the collaborative process, 18 were able to provide examples where they felt mission was not aligned in practices. Most of the examples were not directly about the collaboration of which they were a part but revolved around larger campus practices that affected the collaboration or collaborators in negative ways. Many of these examples were around how firing practices or restructuring was done in a siloed manner via top-down directives from the President or upper leadership that were financially driven and seen as misaligned with the mission. For these examples, participants noted that while these decisions could have been done in a more Ignatian way they understood that as tuition-driven institutions these outcomes are sometimes inevitable. Lisa (student affairs) felt that it was unfair to categorize “hard business decisions” as misaligned with the Jesuit mission:

We are a place that is grounded in a set of shared values, but we’re also like a business with financial realities. When hard business decisions are made, people can be quick to accuse the institution of not living up to its values.

Over half the participants mentioned that the social justice component of the Jesuit mission was not entirely actualized in practice. Most participants noted that as predominantly White institutions, they felt that they were in misalignment with the Jesuits mission to be in “service of faith and the promotion of social justice.” As the focus of their collaborations was the persistence of students, participants felt challenged that their campus was not providing an

environment where underrepresented and minority populations could see themselves being successful. Matt (student affairs) noted,

We are challenged by our lack of representation of diverse students on campus all the time. Because when you talk about the social justice piece, and you look at who is here, who is not here, who has access to this place, and who doesn't, those are the disconnects...from our commitment to social justice.

Richard (academic affairs) added that his collaboration sees a misalignment in how the campus supports first-generation and low-income students. He stated:

We struggle to help these students who are incredibly talented and qualified to come academically, they just cannot afford it. Our inability to help them fund that education is in direct disconnect with the Jesuit mission. When you know about the history of Jesuit education whom they were intended to serve, we're not serving that population. We're serving the privileged folks that can afford to pay without as much financial aid.

Participants noted that there are elements of the mission that are more “comfortable for campus members to tackle.” Many noted that inequality and diversity concerns regarding gender and race were still contentious topics. Carmen (academic affairs) noted that on her campus:

We talk a lot about social justice, diversity, and our passion for that. However, I think that's where we've been lacking...There have been opportunities to create programming, specifically to deal with issues of racial inequality and racial justice, but we've shied away...because it's too controversial or uncomfortable. I think that's where we have absolutely not embodied our mission...Even from a gender perspective, sometimes I feel our senior faculty, or senior members of the community, with women they treat us sometimes like we're glorified secretaries...Not blatant, it is micro aggressions.

Structural complexities. This study found that a significant factor in sustaining cross-divisional partnerships depends on how the institution is organized, and the campus' commitment to creating an infrastructure that supports its longevity. Table 4 organizes the structural factors that were discussed most frequently by participants as influencing collaboration, according to their institution. Although the study was not designed to investigate the campuses as individual case studies, I found that participants from the same sites generally had similar feelings about the impact structural complexities had on collaborations. An “X” was given if the majority of

participants from that campus mentioned the organizational factor as influencing (positively or negatively) the ability to partner or sustain collaborations.

Table 4

Influence of Structural Complexities by Institution

Structural Complexities	Apostle University	Arrupe University	Examen University	Francis University	Ignatian University	Magis University
Resources	X	X	X	X	X	X
Size	X		X	X	X	X
Loosely-Coupled Departments	X	X	X		X	
Institutional Transition/ Turnovers	X	X	X	X	X	X
Support from Leadership	X	X	X	X	X	
Reporting Hierarchies/ Accountability Structures	X	X	X			X

Eighteen participants mentioned the role that institutional resources played in developing and sustaining collaborations. Participants discussed resources in four categories: financial constraints, personnel, reward structures, and time. Over half of participants noted because they work at tuition-driven institutions, specific fiscal constraints make dedicated resources inconsistent or sparse. Marco (student affairs) noted that this might be universal of private Catholic campuses:

Especially private campuses, private Catholic campuses, the retention numbers and making your classes is so connected to your bottom line, so a big challenge for us is financial constraints and limited resources. The dedicated resources we had to give to collaborate are now limited. We all now have to do more with less.

Ten participants also addressed not having enough personnel to accomplish the goals of the collaboration. Most participants noted that specifically for student persistence collaborations, more people are needed to handle the increase in complex student needs. Many participants

noted that their personnel are “stretched thin” because the “resources that would’ve serviced our students in the past are not enough now.”

Eight participants verbalized that their institution’s current reward system was not aligned well for encouraging or sustaining collaboration. Renee (academic affairs) discussed that it was difficult to engage faculty in retention collaborations because the work would be considered as “extra for faculty,” as their merit and reward structure did not establish this type of service as their primary work. Many of the collaborators noted that in order to get academics involved, they had to provide course releases or stipends. The student affairs officers mentioned that no additional compensation is provided when they are part of additional committees and there was an expectation to do additional committee work voluntarily. Matt (student affairs) noted, “There may be some equity/equality issues or barriers that are created just because of the way the two sides are set up to function organizationally. They don’t exactly reflect each other equally regarding compensating time in that respect.” Marco (student affairs) added that institutions that want to truly support collaboration “changed their rewards structures to show the value of it and say, ‘This is something that’s important.’ So, promotion and tenure for faculty, for, maybe evaluations for administrators.”

Many of the participants noted that their involvement in persistence collaborations was in addition to their established job responsibilities. Therefore, dedicating time to these partnerships was noted as quite challenging among all participants. Marco (student affairs) added, “There’s a desire that maybe some leadership also understood the significant time it takes to do as well.” Overall, participants felt that collaborations were most successful when their institutions made an effort to establish an infrastructure alignment and dedicated appropriate resources.

One of the organizational factors most frequently noted as supportive to collaborating was the small size of the institution. Sixteen participants expressed that the size of their campus

contributed positively to developing and sustaining collaborations because it allowed for high interpersonal connectivity and building relational connections. Participants noted that the campus' small size provided the "opportunity to see people," "run into each other" and "meet at the coffee shop to talk." which created "an environment that helped to reduce departmental silos." Jessica (academic affairs) noted that at Examen:

We hear so often about how Student Affairs and Academic Affairs can talk past one another. We benefit that we're a small institution, and most of us are one-person operations regarding our job functions. So, we can't do our jobs without others...because we've had to work closely together, we've developed trust and respect with one another.

All participants from Francis and Magis University mentioned that the institution's size helps reduce hierarchical barriers to collaborations and increase cultivating interpersonal relationships. Keith (student affairs) epitomized this finding, stating, "There's that element to it and its relational. Given our size, we are just used to working with each other, and we like each other. We forget where we are on the org chart."

The participants who discussed decentralized systems or loose coupling generally alluded to people at the institution "staying in their lanes" as to not overstep responsibility boundaries. Participants from Ignatian University saw this model as a strength of collaborating, as everyone in the partnership respected their roles and responsibilities. Holly, a student affairs officer, described it as follows; "We're three cars, we're driving down the same road in the same direction, but we're in three different lanes. If we're all doing our job well and everybody respects each other's work, then we're in good shape." Issues concerning decentralized systems were most apparent when collaborators were developing policies or rules around student success. Participants noted that the most significant impact was when colleges or departments had decentralized policies or procedures that were inconsistent with each other. This caused issues when collaborators were trying to help navigate students from different majors. Lisa (student

affairs) elaborated that, “Each college operates on their own in terms of creating student policies...case by case, dean by dean decision-making without consistency. It makes navigating student issues more difficult.”

Interestingly, all participants noted that their institution recently experienced significant transitions in senior leadership or had high levels of administrative turnover. Participants perceived the transitions at these campuses as having both a positive and negative impact on collaborating. For many institutions, transitions allowed for new leadership who prioritized collaboration and retention initiatives. For example, at Francis University there were “significant shifts though in our senior leadership positions, but through those shifts, our new leadership has made retention a priority.” At Apostle University, shifts in upper personnel were rocky and uncomfortable, but “what ended up happening was that the people who then took those positions of authority modeled real, true collaborative behavior.” At Magis University and Apostle University, a turnover allowed for the reduction of divisional silos. Sandra (academic affairs) elaborated:

In the past, we were much more siloed. We would run into roadblocks around collaboration and territoriality. A lot of that is now gone...there is much more willingness and eagerness to come to the table as full collaborators.... We’ve had a pretty substantial leadership changeover in the last 12 months, now we have senior leaders who’ve been at the institution for a long time and are good collaborators. I think their care for the institution, their care for student, and their collaborative nature, and their trust...has really opened many doors to collaborate.

Leigh (student affairs) added that after a significant downsizing, at Apostle, “People had to have conversations about doing things differently and rising from that...It’s been healthy for our organization...opened up communication and dialogue and created a trust that didn’t exist before.”

Conversely, participants noted that transition could make collaborating more difficult if relevant personnel involved in the partnership leave, as there is a “loss of institutional memory

and history every time there's a switch." At Examen, participants noted that restructuring after personnel left made it "hard to figure out who is doing what and what their office is, and how it's changed. Oftentimes we need a scorecard to tell who does what." Additionally, when senior leadership changed frequently, strategic goals around persistence or prioritization to collaborate may fluctuate. For example, at Apostle University, they have had four different presidents in 6 years. Participants noted that with each transition a new strategic vision and goals for retaining students was developed, making it challenging to benchmark success.

Verbal recognition and support from senior leadership about the value of collaboration for student persistence was viewed as significant. Carmen (academic affairs) noted that at Francis University

I think the most successful initiatives are ones where the senior administration has verbally supported...as they report back to the Board of Trustees. They have connections across the campus community to create buy-in...their support goes a long way to helping the collaboration be successful.

Along these same lines, Jonathan (academic affairs) noted that at Examen University collaborations don't get too far without the Provost's support. He noted, "We can cross-functionally come up with great collaborative ideas and everything. However, ultimately, if the provost is supportive, then you've got a chance at it." Jessica (academic affairs) and Lisa (student affairs) added, "Our Provost came to one of our meetings last year just to say, "The work that you do is important. We appreciate it," and "We've got support there that we know we're doing important work. It is verbalized by our president, provost, and board." Similarly, at Apostle University and Arrupe University, leadership promoting collaborative models leads to "the whole campus feels it, and they truly look for ways to collaborate because leadership values it" and "we have a president who understands that the work we are doing together is critical."

Many of the institutions involved in this study had shifted to a provost model of reporting. For the universities that had this model, all felt it helped support cross-divisional collaboration, as it brought academic and student affairs under the same reporting hierarchy. Participants noted that this created a “stronger accountability structure from the provost down.” Participants from Examen University felt that there were benefits to being in the provost model, as it created “organizational structures both formally and informally that allow us to engage with our colleagues in the academic colleges when we are all meeting together to report progress to the Provost.” Conversely, universities that did not have a provost model found it more difficult to determine ownership over directives or ensure projects were in alignment with university goals, as there is no cohesive charge from upper leadership. Sandra (academic affairs) explained that she was

given a directive by my Vice President to increase retention and graduation rates. I then sought out ways to collaborate around that goal with my student affairs counterparts. The challenge is there’s not been a formal charge [from leadership] to work together.

Regardless of reporting structures and organization chart configurations, accountability over retention and persistence outcomes still appeared to be a challenge. Many noted that because retention outcomes were viewed as “everyone’s responsibility,” no one division or department could ultimately be held accountable for outcomes. Some participants noted that other non-Jesuit campuses had utilized funding models to incentivize accountability regarding retention. All noted that given their campus culture, that model did not seem like a feasible or necessary option. Many felt that establishing and formalizing more collaborative committees that shared the responsibility would help to improve campus-wide accountability. Eliza (student affairs) provided a representative statement about this viewpoint by stating:

Retention is one that if you house it in an office, it becomes that office’s responsibility and nobody else’s. If you do it by a formalized committee with a direct reporting line and recommendations to your top person, who then has the capabilities to make people

accountable, that's your best bet. Especially, at a Jesuit school...Everybody needs to feel like they had representation and accountability for outcomes.

Section III: Individual Characteristics

“I can teach someone skills any day, but I can't teach them to have compassion. You need that to be a good partner.”

-Merry (academic affairs)

This study found that participants used individual characteristics of collaborators as a key way to define and describe successful partnerships. For this study, the term “individual characteristics” is meant to describe and define the personal attributes or qualities of collaborators/ members of the collaboration. All participants noted at least one interpersonal skill or attribute when asked to define why their collaborations were successful. Kathy's (student affairs) sentiment reflected most participants' response to the questions:

A lot of our success is less organizational factors and more personnel or personality-based; people knowing each other, trusting and respecting one another, knowing someone to be a strong collaborator...open to outreach and dialogue. It comes down to that you knowing their intentions align with the goals of the partnership and our mission.

Participants identified three key interpersonal attributes of individuals who help foster a strong collaboration: cultivating mutual respect and trust, being a collaborative champion, and valuing dialogue and compromise within the partnership. The combination of these collaborator characteristics leads to building a partnership with a foundation created through strong interpersonal relationships.

Fourteen participants noted that successful collaborators understand the value of mutual respect (i.e., building trust, having an appreciation of other's expertise, and validating the complexity of their professional roles). Participants also placed a high value on a collaborators' ability to be “compassionate.” This seemed to relate directly to members' ability to be in alignment with the Jesuit and Ignatian approach to navigating tense and difficult situations.

Research notes the importance of trust and mutual respect as “the first and most important aspects of partnering” as they bind “people together when there are potentially few other incentives to work together” (Kezar & Lester 2009, p. 103). Participants noted that the “first and foremost” component of creating trust was valuing members’ expertise. Many participants stated that being involved in collaborations provided exposure to different roles and knowledge, which helped build mutual respect for the value they brought to the partnership. Participants also discussed that in order to build trust and interpersonal relationships, individuals must be willing to learn from each other and develop new understandings based on diverse experiences. For example, Sarah (academic affairs) perceived a strong sense of trust and respect within her collaboration based on individuals’ willingness to ask questions and adjusted based on new information such as, “What are they juggling all the time? What are the roadblocks, the things that are happening in their world that we wouldn’t normally see?” Kathy (student affairs) added,

This collaboration is the most rewarding and fulfilling experiences I’ve had here at Magis, in ways that I wasn’t expecting. I think when I reflect on what makes it feel successful, I think first is that it’s built on a foundation of respect for each other’s roles.

Lisa (student affairs) found that trust was built based on the difficulty of the work the group does together:

There’s a lot of trust within the group. So, I think it’s one of the most effective and efficient groups that I’ve been a part of. When you are working together on 50, 60 students cases all dealing with some trauma or crisis...the group over time has developed tremendous trusts in each other, values the expertise that each person brings to the space, is truly willing to collaborate.

Participants discussed the high value they place on “starting collaborative work from a place of trust” and letting their collaborators know that they are “learning from them and building it into the way that they structure their partnerships.” Over half of participants mentioned that individuals that were unable to build trust and respect through a mutual interest didn’t last long in the partnership, or many times the institution. Keith (student affairs) perceived

his role as the co-chair of the collaboration as a facilitator to building trust among partners. He stated, “I sometimes see my job as to shut up and facilitate that connection, that building of trust. I think having everybody leave saying, ‘I learned something from the other side,’ is my ultimate goal.” Carmen (academic affairs) noted that she makes an effort to get to know people she is collaborating with to develop trust by “going to their offices, going to their events, I think the more I do that, the more they trust what my intentions are, and what kind of a collaborator I am.” Overall, participants noted that without trust and goodwill, partnerships cannot move forward.

The ability to engage in dialogue and compromise when tensions arise was a continued theme throughout interviews. Participants viewed this tactic as a valuable method skilled collaborators use to sustain the partnership and its trajectory through ebbs and flows of change happening within the institution. Thirteen participants noted that they found value in being able to discuss contentious or difficult topics with one another. Additionally, the concept of compromising and working through conflict and disagreement during the collaboration was deemed essential. Tony (academic affairs) noted that dialoguing is an essential part of building strong membership dynamics as it provides a safe place to hash out concerns:

We make sure there is the ability to have an open forum, and people shared their feelings. We’ve always believed it’s like a family here...we’re all not gonna agree. We’re gonna yell and scream. But when we walk out the door it’s on the same path.

Sarah (academic affairs) added that the

continuing dialogue sustained our collaboration. And we’ve changed, we’ve gone through several iterations of the partnership, but we’ve never lost that dialogue between the academic and the student life side. I think that ability to dialogue has helped us to focus and collaborate.

Renee (academic affairs) discussed that being able to foster these conversations breaks down barriers and allows individuals to question their perspectives and biases. She noted,

Some of the best conversations I’ve ever had with administrators happens in our meetings, especially when we’ve talked about diversity issues where people were really,

earnestly questioning the data, trying to understand, interrogating their own biases, engaged in difficult dialogue.

Alternatively, not engaging in dialogue can have negative consequences for partnerships. Most participants discussed collaborations that failed due to individuals not being able to navigate conflict through dialogues. Kathy noted that failing to dialogue “renders the partnership ineffective, the conflict just brews and brews, and no one addresses it.”

In addition to being open to dialogue, the ability to compromise was noted as a key attribute to be a strong collaborator. Eliza (student affairs) mentioned that:

nobody gets 100% what they want because you have to compromise. I think it's one of the best things that we do in our group.... We're all coming together with a common shared cause, and we're all approaching it differently. But we're all gonna maneuver...get where we need to go together even if we have to make certain personal accommodations.

Keith (student affairs) added,

I think people enjoy the discussion and look forward to the compromise. Debate and discussion go to the heart of what we do in higher education. It goes to the heart of our Jesuit mission....That's one reason why I think our collaborations are so sustainable.

In addition to building trust and having the ability to foster transparent dialogue, 16 participants noted that having individuals who championed collaborations, and connected people across campus to work together was essential to developing successful partnerships. My study found that these individuals are typically longtime members of the campus who have already developed extensive networks themselves. The majority of the participants in my study self-identified as being collaborative champions and embodied this attribute. Research also points to the importance of identifying and cultivating “natural network builders” who have high “collaborative competency” to be a part of cross-functional collaborations, as they are generally more comfortable bridging divergent professional cultures based on the relationships they have established (Kezar & Lester, 2009, p. 111).

My study found that collaborative champions embody a few key characteristics: (a) they valued and understood the need for intersectionality to create and sustain successful collaborations, (b) they understood the nuances of student and academic affairs professional identities/ subcultures and the impact it has on collaborating cross-divisionally, (c) they felt comfortable acting as information conduits between divisions help ease any tensions, (d) they act as “cheerleaders” and “early adopters” to promote collaborative initiatives across divisions, and (e) they have political and interpersonal capital within the institution that helps leverage buy-in. Additionally, as mentioned earlier in the study, 11 participants felt closely connected to the other division based on having professional experience in that area. These participants noted that having both professional lived experiences helped them navigate counter perspectives more seamlessly and enhanced their ability to be collaborative champions. Renee (academic affairs) noted that she “strategically identified” herself as a collaborative champion immediately upon starting at Arrupe University and that “the trust in me that I was a champion for student affairs” became a “foundation for all that we are currently doing to sustain collaborations.” Cynthia (student affairs) perceived her ability to champion collaborations as based on her experience as a tenured faculty member:

When trying to collaborate with academics, it was important for me to pull from my experiences as a faculty member for almost ten years before I moved into administration. I had a similar experience; it wasn't just a career as an administrator... It has helped me bridge some people together to create some great partnerships.

Conversely, Jessica (academic affairs) noted that her previous roles in student affairs helped her to understand counter perspectives and their professional lived experiences. She stated,

I get what they do. I understand and respect it, not to say that others don't, but I don't think they quite get it. Like getting a phone call at 2:00 AM, I understand it in a way others may not...I know the work they do is as important as the academics.

Academic and student affairs participants noted the value of using collaborative champions to act as “conduits to the academic side” in helping faculty understand the importance of their collaboration or persistence initiatives. They noted that an academic “talking about the collaboration and the way we work together and the outcomes that we provide for students, is far better than them just walking in cold to that space” and that it is “very helpful to have them help bridge the conversation between units.” Also, I identified that these institutions were attempting to hire more individuals that would act as collaborative champions especially in student success and persistence roles in academic and student affairs divisions. By analyzing four to five job descriptions at these campuses, I found that there was a focus on hiring candidates who would act as collaborative champions. For example, under the job qualifications, many postings listed that ideal candidates would “help forge a seamless educational experience for students by working collaboratively with faculty and other colleagues across the institution.” Others noted the importance of being able to “coordinate and collaborate with administrative and academic schools and departments” and “be a champion for collaboration as part of the broader university support network and committees.” Another listed that the person would be “Engaging and work collaboratively with other University departments and programs to address student success,” and “have excellent collaboration skills.” When I asked Sandra (academic affairs) about a job posting that I analyzed in her academic department, she noted how important it was to hire someone with collaborative champion attributes,

We want folks who are engaging, and who are not afraid to reach out across divisions, being able to be a bigger-picture thinker, we are looking for someone who understands student success and cares, but also has the interpersonal skills to collaborate.

Section IV: External Factors

As the theoretical framework for this study explained, higher education institutions are seen as open systems, and therefore, interact with external factors that may affect organizational

or individual dynamics. Therefore, participants were asked about whether external factors were affecting the ability for student and academic affairs to collaborate successfully. All 22 participants were able to identify external factors they felt were influencing the university, and subsequently, affecting their collaboration and its intended goals improve student success and persistence. I found that the most influential external factors were: changes students attending Jesuit institutions both regarding demographics and the complexity of their support needs (i.e., wellness, resilience, and academic support), misalignment of board members to the institutional mission and their influence on organizational decisions, and federal compliances. Less consistently referenced, but also noted, were financial constraints of being a tuition-dependent institution, cost of tuition for students, parental concerns, and national rankings (e.g., U.S. News and World Report). Shannon (academic affairs) noted the impact these factors have on collaborations that are trying to determine ways to help students be successful:

Variations in the student experiences, based on all these external factors that may play a role, make it very difficult and very challenging to say this is what's in the best interest of the student.... I think it creates tensions for collaborating.

Changes in students attending Jesuit institutions. Changes in students attending Jesuit institutions—and their increased student support needs—was the most frequently cited external factor affecting these collaborations. Eighteen participants noted that students attending their institutions were quite different from 10 years ago, requiring more accommodations and support both academically and emotionally. Mike (student affairs) commented that the students he sees in recent years need much more support from faculty and staff to be successful. He used the following metaphor to describe the situation:

It's no longer just meeting students halfway across a bridge to keep them here and successful. I need to go across the bridge, down the pathway, under the waterfall and over there on the rock is the student. And I've got to use every last bit of charm, motivation, counseling, whatever, to say, hey, if you come with me, I'll even hold your hand for a bit.

Keith (student affairs) noted a conversation he had with a faculty member about the changes in students at Francis:

Faculty are saying, “This student I had today, is not the student I had 20 years ago. They need so much more hand-holding. They’ve got accommodation letters... dual diagnoses, and they are not paying attention, and they speak five languages, but I can’t get them to tell me the differences between phylum and class.”

Many participants noted that increases in the cost of a private Jesuit education created a shift in the student landscape, which meant that they were no longer getting as many high-performing high-need regional students. Kathy (student affairs) mentioned that “We’re pulling from some regions that are looking at free public colleges or free community colleges or different types of funding structures and we can’t compete with those aid packages.” Shannon (academic affairs) added that on her campus,

I would say we have probably more polarized students. We have more students with lower EFC’s [Expected Family Contribution] for lack of a better marker, but at the same time, we have more students who are wealthy. The income gap on our campus is widening. We know that, and we have to navigate that change in students coming in.

Another shift noted was that students seemed to have a higher willingness to transfer multiple times, making persistence conversations more complex. Kathy (student affairs) stated, “I think we are dealing with things that we’re seeing more broadly, even just the transfer culture. Our students are transferring more, and sometimes transferring more than once, which I think was kind of unheard of several years ago.” Mary Ann (academic affairs) added that some students even have “transfer contracts” with other institutions that are “hurting the smaller institutions, and students are just a little bit more willing to bounce around that first and second year which is critical to persistence.”

Participants perceived the increase in emotional and academic support needs for current students as the most identifiable external factor influencing the ability to sustain student persistence collaborations. Many noted a dramatic increase in cases where the student needed

wrap-around supports to be successful and that the influx was challenging to handle based on current personnel and resources. Eliza (student affairs) commented that she perceived “the biggest external factor is the higher number of students coming to us with diagnosed mental illness, high levels of anxiety or depression.” She has noticed that “this generation of student lacks a couple of resiliencies that we in an older retention model expected them to have when they arrived as a freshman.” Many participants noted that their counseling center and academic resource center usage has skyrocketed to the point that they have backlogs and waiting lists of students to try to get appointments. This influx has dramatically affected collaborators’ ability to pull together resources and people to work together on persistence issues. Mike (student affairs) noted that at his campus, “We see a 10 to 15 volume increases in usage rates of wellness and counseling needs every year.” Mary Ann (academic affairs) added that her campus is also seeing an uptick in “in accessibility, in mental health issues, in academic support needs, students’ lack of preparedness for college emotionally, academically.” She noted,

I think they’re checking all the boxes before they get here, but they’re still having quite the adjustment to reach that level of expectation. The student contact is so constant...there’s a lot we could do on the retention committee if we just had more time and resources.

Many participants added that although increases in wellness concerns of college-aged students may be a national trend due to students having more emotional support throughout K-12, Jesuit institutions might be seeing a more substantial increase based on their mission of *cura personalis* and reputation of being “close-touch.” Jonathan (academic affairs) summarized this finding:

Students are coming to us with more complex needs...when you’re mission-based, and you carry forward the principles we do at a Jesuit institution, then family members say, “We want our students there because they do have needs and they’re more likely to be successful there.” Well, that makes sense, but then that puts more pressure on the people here. You have to allocate resources to be able to address those needs. Merely

collaborating to improve retention won't fix that students are coming in with more complex concerns making it harder to retain them.

Sandra (academic affairs) noted that 30 percent of students at her campus are engaged with the counseling center when the national average is 15 percent and that "Students seem to come to us sicker than did in the past." She shared that, "It's hard to know if students who have a history of engaging mental health services are picking us because they know we are a close-touch school. It's something we discuss in the collaboration quite often." She added:

I think it has something to do with changes in the mental health field, with medication and therapy, that now allows students who have challenges to go to college. They have opportunities now that they wouldn't have had in the past, so it's a change in the student demographics across the board, but specifically for us as a Jesuit school. It is putting a lot of additional pressure on us to help them even with the additional support they receive.

Overall, changes in student demographics were perceived as impacting the daily work and holistic success of persistence collaborations on Jesuit campuses.

Board members. Participants vocalized that board members' decisions about organizational practices heavily influences the ability to create and sustain collaborations.

Carmen (academic affairs) commented, "A big factor that impacts collaboration would be our board, what our board wants. Some initiatives might be simply because the Board of Trustees feels that this is something that needs to get done." Although many noted that boards that have members that are well aligned with the school's mission could positively influence student success collaborations, others commented that boards that are not aligned with the mission could be problematic. Jonathan (academic affairs) commented that, "Board members coming in from the outside is a huge concern. They have a business perspective; but we're non-profit. We're a mission-oriented institution!" He added,

What happens is you recruit board members who give a lot of money. And then, because they are giving all the money, they're going to want it to be influential regarding what occurs and how it occurs. And they may or may not have much respect for the academic nature or mission of the institution at all.

Mike (student affairs) agreed that based on his observations, Jesuit schools are replacing mission-oriented individuals on their boards with “business people” who lack the commitment to the Jesuit educational ideology. He commented that this shift gives him concern as “boards now have gotten to the point where in a lot of our schools, they have a lot more power than they used to about daily functions.” He added, “This shift has been a huge change that complicates our ability to remain Jesuit ordination.”

Compliance. Participants noted that with increasing federal compliances linked to funding and accreditation, their institutions had to shift towards a more collaborative model to accommodate new regulations. The federal compliances most frequently referenced were Title IX and disability compliance. Eliza (student affairs) noted that the new federal compliance requirements, coupled with the economic crisis in 2008, have led to some tensions within collaborations as many felt the additional requirements were too burdensome and not aligned with what the collaborators had envisioned. She recalled:

The federal government kept tacking on new compliances for international...for sexual assault, for disabilities, for Title IX. So, then it became a question, who’s gonna do all this?... Collaborations were formed, but there were some resentments...about what the law tells us we have to do...starts to create more tension...makes it difficult for collaborations to sustain.

Other participants mentioned that the need to comply with new regulations increased the number of students who needed services, but that, “No extra money came for any of that, but the expectation for what we have to do for any of those situations is extremely high.” This created tensions as resources for collaborations around student success were not in abundance at the time. Jessica (academic affairs) commented on the “great deal of people-power” needed to support a Title IX investigation and stay in compliance. She noted, “One single case takes many

campus members working collaboratively to support the student in persisting here. We only have so many people, so all of our work is impacted by just one case. And there's never just one case."

National rankings. An interesting finding was that participants did not note rankings more frequently as an external factor that influenced their persistence collaborations. Although rankings were acknowledged as something schools used to benchmark their retention rates, most noted that it does not directly impact or motivate the work they are doing on a daily basis. Mary Ann (academic affairs) noted that she thought, "Personally, I feel like everyone should take rankings with a grain of salt." However, she recognized that "our prospective families use rankings, and I know that they are a big part of what our board and our administration look to as well in getting to that next spot or that highly sought-after spot." However, she felt that "it doesn't impact what we are doing on the ground." Lisa (student affairs) added that she "doesn't feel pressure in the work we do collaboratively to think about rankings." Tony commented that his collaboration's goals have never been, "Do this because it will improve our ranking." He feels that most of his colleagues feel that "the rankings are secondary at our institution. They'll come if we're doing our job. And we shouldn't do our job to be ranked." The few participants (4) that did think rankings were influential discussed how they could be good motivators or "pressures" to form collaborations to improve student success. Michelle (student affairs) felt that rankings reflected a reputational pressure for her institution to improve student success outcomes through collaboration. She noted,

We don't want parents or students saying, "Everyone that went to Ignatian University left after 2 years"...because then no one is going to want to come here. It pressures us to work together so our reputation for helping students be successful here is maintained.

Section V: Guidance from Participants

The final question posed in the interview protocol asked participants to provide any guidance or advice to other academic or student affairs professionals hoping to develop

successful collaborations focused on student persistence. Participants were first asked about the guidance they would give to practitioners who shared their professional identities, and then asked for advice for counterparts interested in collaborating with their professional peer group. In the prior sections of this chapter, participants' experiences helped to uncover the key factors influencing the ability to partner. The goal of this section is to present their cumulative insights on how to overcome obstacles to and create pathways for collaboration, through strategies, skills, and practices. The result is a meaningful exchange of best practices for developing, implementing, and sustaining academic and student affairs partnerships.

Student affairs to student affairs (collaborating with academic affairs). Participants focused on the importance of establishing personal connections and prioritized relationship building as a key element of successful partnerships with academic affairs. This theme was also highlighted as a key individual characteristic in section three of this chapter. Some noted that this might be difficult to do based on perceptions and assumptions that academic affairs can be a difficult division with which to engage based on their values regarding autonomy. However, most student affairs participants noted that when they invested the time to engage faculty, they were pleasantly surprised that academics were willing to make connections with them. Lisa noted, "It doesn't necessarily happen overnight, and some relationships are harder to develop than others due to professional norms or philosophy towards the work, but...it is time well spent." A few best practices were noted to help increase personal connections with academics who including inviting them to meet for informal outings like coffee or lunch. Additionally, a key strategy was being present in their professional space more regularly. Mike added, "Go in their door, and come out yours as working with academic partners is highly relational." Kathy added value to this theme by suggesting a good way to establish those connections is to "get into their space when there's an open faculty meeting or when there is a training when there is a

department meeting when you could be present to establish a connection.” Holly mentioned that a great way to build relationships with academics is to show up and support their initiatives and introduce yourself afterward. Holly noted that a big mistake she finds new Student Affairs professionals make is “only inviting faculty to their events but not feeling comfortable to go to academic events.” She also encourages asking one’s supervisors to keep an eye out for opportunities to link up with academic counterparts through committees, interview panels, and programming.

Understanding the common purpose and building relationships based on that commonality was a second theme in the guidance provided by student affairs participants. How does one find common ground? Many of the student affairs officers advise their peers not to assume an understanding of academics’ views, experiences, desires, or skills they can bring to the collaboration. Eliza noted the importance of being open to understanding academics’ perspectives as a method for finding common ground. She explained,

You gotta go in first willing to listen and understanding that they’re coming from a completely different lived experience and perspective in their job than you are. So, you have to do a diligent job of understanding that and also trying to share your own experience...It helps you understand they are not the enemy.

Leigh said she knows that she and her academic counterparts are not always going to see “eye to eye,” but what has helped her is establishing commonality through the mission of being a Jesuit educator. She suggested tactics of “reframing” when frustrations arise between partners and focusing on a common mission about “our students, our care, and concern for them, or the mission of the institution.” Another method discussed to establish a common ground was to be transparent about the differences in professional identities and discuss them head on. For example, Marco implemented a training for student affairs officers to help them better understand the lived experiences of academics, which he feels has improved the ability for those

officers to find common ground with faculty partners. The training involved a perspective-taking exercise where they gave collaborators a list of “faculty characteristics” and “student affairs characteristics” and they had an opportunity to discuss. Through this practice, collaborators had the opportunity to discuss stereotypes and misconceptions about their professional group and discuss how or why institutional pressures may affect them differently. Marco noted, “I think a lot of our student affairs mentors has their eyes opened to what it is to be a faculty member. I feel it’s helped them be better partners.” In addition to finding common ground, all the student affairs officers expressed the importance of establishing standard expectations for the partnership, determining how best to work together to operationalize the collaboration and agreeing on a structure and parameters that works for both parties.

Finally, student affairs participants reinforced the need for their peers to embrace their expertise and skills and view them as an entry point to helping academics in ways they are unable to accomplish without student affairs officers. Many participants noted that although these skills or assets to the partnership might not be academic in nature, they needed to enter into the partnership feeling as though their contributions are no less important to the initiative as a whole. Additionally, they should be “actively self-aware of their skill sets,” and look for ways that their skills can “be value added to the partnership.” Holly noted that student affairs just had a “different piece of the partnership pie” and that having the mentality that “Well, they have a Ph.D. so that they can do anything” was not true in her experience. Michelle provided an anecdote that embodied the essence of this finding. She told me:

I met with a faculty fellow for a residence hall. He talked about this wonderful Residence Director he collaborates with...” When I want to take students to the Museum of Art, she knows how to get me a bus...I couldn’t run my program without her skills.” I went back to my campus, and I said, “Guys, we’ve got skills. We’re not just gophers.”...However, we don’t always appreciate that we [Student Affairs] have something to bring to the table.

Student affairs to academic affairs (collaborating with student affairs). When asked about guidance student affairs professionals would provide to academics looking to engage in partnerships, many participants reacted with levity. When the laughing subsided, most participants responded with comments aligned with higher education literature on professional subcultures, thus reinforcing findings that student affairs divisions are generally willing and eager to work collaboratively when presented the opportunity (Kezar, Hirsch, & Burack, 2002). Michelle's immediate response was "I'd first say, 'Oh yes, please. We'd be happy to work with you!'" Similarly, Mike responded,

If academics wanted to partner with us, would I need to give them advice? Student affairs folks generally are ready to partner that if somebody's got a great idea for enhancing student success or learning, we're pretty easy to win over.

However, after those initial responses, participants had a few additional insights for academic counterparts who are looking to engage in cross-functional collaborations, mostly involving the importance of having intellectual respect for partners and valuing their expertise regarding student learning and success. As mentioned in section two of this chapter, most participants could elaborate on the divergence between academics and student affairs as it related to ownership over the academic enterprise, especially over learning inside the classroom. To help overcome this barrier, participants suggested that academics should enter the collaboration viewing student affairs officers as educators in their own right and give them an equal level of intellectual respect as they might an academic partner. All of the participants stated that it is essential for academic affairs officers to understand student affairs officers chose their profession just as faculty chose theirs. Mike noted, "We have all these folks in student affairs with masters, PhDs, EdDs, and JDs" who should be "viewed as experts in their field" similarly to faculty with their academic disciplines. Participants suggested a strategy for academics to build relationships with students affairs is to "start involving them in the classroom where they might need an

additional instructor.” Some participants mentioned that academics could look for ways to pair their courses with complimentary one or two-unit leadership, service, or engaged-learning, sections that student affairs professionals could teach. Other participants discussed examples of co-teaching experiences that they were developed into large-scale interdisciplinary collaborations such as service trips, living-learning communities, and first-year programming. Lisa reaffirmed this point by stating,

If you’re a faculty member inviting a student affairs person to collaborate...make a specific point of saying, you value the expertise they bring.... I think student affairs staff bring incredible talents, expertise, and a complementary skill set that could help faculty engage with students.

Academic affairs to academic affairs (collaborating with student affairs). Many of the academic affairs participants’ guidance to peers largely mirrored what student affairs officers discussed. However, they did provide a slightly different perspective about how their peers should navigate building partnerships regarding two themes: valuing expertise and finding a common purpose. First and foremost, academics urged peers to avoid “belittling” student affairs officers’ expertise. As stated by the student affairs participants, many felt that they entered collaborations as the “gopher” and brought less value. To counter this feeling of inadequacy, academic participants encouraged their peers to be “mindful of this implicit assumption that what you’re doing is more important” before engaging a counterpart. Sarah noted that in her experience, what has helped reduced this implicit assumption is to start the collaboration with transparent conversations to make partners feel there is mutual respect. She stated that she first approaches these types of collaborations by asking her counterparts about “their stresses and pressures. Their roadblocks, the things that are happening in their world that we wouldn’t normally see.” Academic participants recognized that small gestures went a long way to build trust and respect with student affairs counterparts. Many noted other types of small gestures of

mutual respect and validation including the importance of being a present and engaged partner and “not just being a lump on a log, sitting there listening, and just throwing in your two cents and leaving.” Others spoke about the importance of “giving credit where credit was due” and “recognizing that your counterpart was the point person and did the bulk of the work.” Many noted it was important to “share your thoughts about the importance of that person to the goals of the collaboration when you are talking to higher-ups on the academic side of the house.” Another tactic used was to reach out and invite their counterparts to participate in interviews when there are hiring academic positions to show support of collaborative decision-making. Carmen recalled a time from a meeting when she surprised how a small gesture was influential to creating a collaborative culture:

Student Affairs needed a speaker for an event. I said, “I’ll talk to my dean about it/...Let me pitch it to him.”... What came of that was something positive for student affairs. I remember the Student Affairs rep saying, “Thank you for doing that. You didn’t have to, but you did, and it means a lot.

Academics also encouraged their peers to find common ground by being open and willing to learn about existing programs already offered by student affairs to partner with instead of having them follow your initiative from scratch. Mary Ann suggested that academics “do your research as not to create redundant partnerships that would dilute what student affairs is already doing well.” Based on her experiences,

It has always been in my best interest to say, “I know that you’re already doing this program...I’d like to do is fill this gap based on this information.” Student affairs is very focused on data and providing outcomes, so be sure to show them how adding your component to what they’re already doing might strengthen the work as a whole.

Carmen reaffirmed this approach and stated, “Make sure that you’ve done something in a meeting or conversation so that student affairs people feel like there’s a purpose behind this collaboration. It’s not just you driving the bus, and everyone is spectating.” Sandra and Carmen emphasized the importance of not only inviting student affairs around a defined purpose but

suggested they encourage active dialogue as to not be “the only voice in the room.” Sandra noted how not inviting this dialogue can be a huge loss for the creation of a partnership. She stated, “There needs to be an invitation by the academic side...our student development colleagues don’t feel like they’re invited to share...that their insights will be as valued, and that would be a huge mistake.”

Academic affairs to student affairs (collaborating with academic affairs). Participants focused their advice to student affairs professionals around the concepts of “assuming positive intent” and “not being afraid to speak their minds” when working with academics. Richard stated that “many times he is very willing to partner but may not know how to engage in student affairs.” Tony added that it was important to:

Tell us, folks, if you see anything that we’re doing over here that needs to change, we need to know about it, cause if you don’t tell us we will always act the same way and you’ll get the same results. You need to be open and honest with us. We are receptive to that type of dialogue.

Sandra reinforced and added to Tony’s suggestions by stating, “Don’t be afraid to share what you think, and even to challenge things...to round up the picture or bring a new perspective.”

Finally, academics hoped to share with student affairs professionals some advice on how to meaningfully engage. They suggested approaching academics from a place of wanting to learn about their interests and disciplines. Sarah explained that although academics do care about students, they also care very much about their expertise, and it can be a way to create a pathway to the partnership:

To a history professor, the most important thing in his or her world is the study of history. Don’t poo poo it or negate it. Use it. They want to extend that enthusiasm to students, to staff, to anyone. Give it respect if you are trying to work with them.

Conclusion

A total of 22 academic and student affairs officers shared their views on the organizational, individual, and external factors influencing the ability to collaborate at Jesuit universities. The participants in this study illuminated several potential supports of and inhibitors to developing successful collaborations at their campuses. Factors deemed most important to success were establishing a common purpose grounded in the Jesuit mission, cultivating institutional support, and building a team that has collaborative characteristics. In addition, participants perceived student persistence collaborations at Jesuit institutions as unique, when compared to other campus collaborations, based on their established purpose, processes, structures, and methods of evaluation. Participants were able to identify that changes in student demographics and support needs, selections of board members, and compliance concerns were the key external factors that affect collaborations for student persistence. Overall, participants found intrinsic value in collaborating cross-functionally in the efforts to improve student persistence. Additionally, participants noted that these partnerships were essential to develop and maintain moving forward. As the study's findings presented, participants clearly felt that changes to the Jesuit university landscape, as well as the need to retain students for institutional health, are inevitable. Therefore, successful persistence collaborations between academic and student affairs are essential for the health of the institutions moving forward.

As Jesuit institutions constitute a special type of university, their noted distinctive mission, organizational dynamics, and values required a distinct understanding that this study helped to provide. Chapter V allows for a robust discussion regarding the study's findings and will elaborate on how the findings may be applicable to practice. Limitations of the study and potential future studies will also be discussed.

CHAPTER V: DISSCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

There are no simple answers as to how universities develop successful cross-divisional collaborations to improve student persistence. The extant literature explains collaboration within organizations as a multifaceted phenomenon that is messy, ambiguous, and dynamic due to institutional complexities (Birnbaum, 1988; Bolman & Deal, 1991; Kezar & Lester, 2009; Morgan, 2006). Corroborating this notion, this study finds that influential factors to creating successful partnerships manifest in varying structural, cultural, interpersonal, and external dynamics within an institution. However, this study did find certain factors to be more consistently identified as influential among the selected Jesuit campuses.

Even under the best of circumstances, collaboration is difficult to achieve and sustain. However, as this study shows, collaborating is possible with the correct amalgamation of organizational and individual factors. Therefore, the goal of this study was to provide a better understanding of academic and student affairs collaborators' perceptions of the factors that promote, support, or undermine successful partnerships for student persistence within a unique context, that of Jesuit universities. Utilizing this knowledge, practitioners and university leadership can facilitate environments where purposeful collaborations between academic and student affairs to enhance student persistence can thrive. Additionally, this study provides new and corroborating insights into the collaborative actions and goals that participants define as most successful, and how they could be replicated and implemented.

This chapter begins with an analytical discussion of the most critical findings as they relate to the study's research questions, theoretical framework, and existing literature. Next, the significance of the study's findings for educational leaders—and the implications for impacting their work—is evaluated. This is followed by an exploration of the implications of the study's findings for educational practice. Next, a discussion of the limitations of the study and what

future research might seek to accomplish is presented. The chapter concludes with my reflections on this study and the dissertation process.

Analytical Summary of the Findings

From the data collected, it became evident that participants perceived cross-divisional collaboration as a critical component of student success strategies, and crucial to realizing significant improvements in metrics like student persistence. However, on the campuses studied, organizational factors (i.e., resourcing, leadership support, institutional transitions, mission, academic/ administrative cultures), individual factors (i.e., fostering trust and respect of expertise, collaborative competencies, ability to dialogue), and external factors (i.e., changes to student demographics, compliance, selection of board members) have coalesced to produce an environment that can both support and undermine the sustainability of these essential partnerships. Additionally, although collaborative structures, processes, and methods of evaluating student persistence partnerships varied across the campuses, there was a pronounced trend regarding their common purpose, which focuses on whole-student success grounded in the charisms of the Jesuit mission. The commitment, alignment, infusion, and application of the Jesuit mission into collaborators' daily practices and the organizational dynamics of their campuses, was the most profound and prominent finding of this study. Overwhelmingly, participants perceived the Jesuit mission to provide an essential bedrock for working collaboratively on student persistence initiatives at their institutions.

Organizational Factors

As the study's theoretical framework identified, organizations are dynamic environments that are shaped by cultural and structural complexities (Bolman & Deal, 2008; Morgan, 2006). Therefore, understanding the influence that organizational factors have on the collaborative process is essential to the goals of this study. In this section I will first summarize the study's

findings on two cultural complexities influencing collaborations at Jesuit universities: mission alignment and academic versus administrative cultures. Next will be an analytical discussion of the findings related to structural factors influential to collaborations at these sites. This analytical summary addresses the ways in which the study's findings augment the organizational culture and structure literature and offer a deeper insight into the theoretical perspective from which I drew to develop the framework for this study.

Mission alignment. What stood out the most in my research is how salient the university's Jesuit and Ignatian identity is for participants' daily work, specifically as it relates to collaborating for student persistence. All participants were deeply engaged in the mission of their institution. Their reasons for partnering cross-functionally stems from a commitment to embodying Jesuit charisms, specifically around the community and whole person development. These values and norms were coupled with a desire to be organizationally effective and efficient as practitioners. Collaborators shared these ideals and they became both a normative practice and cultural barometer that guided their behaviors when interacting with the partnership. This finding reinforces existing organizational culture literature by Hoy and Miskel (2001), Ravasi and Schultz (2006), and Bergquist and Pawlak (2008), who found that shared orientations or cognitive frames—such as an institutional mission—unite people with a collective identity and guide groups' actions. Those assumptions, then create a pattern of behavior and perceptions that are taught to new organizational members that guide how they interact with each other and other stakeholders. Also, this study provides evidence to support research by Tierney (1998) and Kezar and Lester (2009) that a shared mission and values—which stakeholders embody—can cultivate environments that minimize conflict and support collaboration.

Also, these findings corroborate research findings by Kezar and Kinzie (2006) in providing evidence to support the notion that the Jesuit mission is the most visible and influential

articulation of the campuses' culture. Participants perceived a strong congruence between the institutions' mission and institutional practices, such as collaborations for student persistence. As expected, many of the fundamental charisms of the Jesuit mission and Ignatian principles guide and shape the approaches to collaborating. *Cura personalis* is perceived as the most distinctive Jesuit principle influencing student persistence collaborative practices, as it allows stakeholders to unite in the mission under the common purpose of whole-student (mind, heart, body, and soul) success. Although measuring the efficacy of mission is ambiguous, there was no doubt that participants perceive that the Jesuit mission does affect implementation of collaborative practices and provides a foundation for them to do their work. The findings also support literature by Rhodes (1989), Kuh (2005), and Kezar and Kinzie (2006), which found that campus stakeholders embodying the mission is a tactic that can combat the disciplinary isolation and departmental fragmentation that is detrimental to creating successful partnerships. Moreover, this study found that contrary to the findings from Mussi's (2008) research, participants felt a deep personal connection to the mission and its alignment to student success outcomes and did not feel challenged about incorporating the principles of the Jesuit mission into their daily practice working with students or collaborators.

Mission alignment was clearly articulated by collaborators as a support for developing, implementing, and sustaining collaborations. However, the study found that even at mission-oriented institutions, the majority of participants were able to identify examples when the mission was not taken into account. They noted that this misalignment negatively influenced the collaborative environment. Most of the examples were not directly related to the collaboration of which they were a part, but revolved around larger campus practices that affected the collaboration or collaborators in negative ways.

Academic versus administrative cultures. Much of the current literature addressing the dynamics of higher education discuss the divergent—and at times conflicting—cultures of academic and administrative groups. Also, research suggests that cultural differences have the potential to be a barrier to partnerships (Beodeker, 2006; Engstrom & Tinto, 2000; Gulley & Mullendore, 2014; Kezar & Lester, 2009). This study corroborated much of the existing literature, finding that most participants experienced a socially constructed chasm between these two divisions, and found it was a potential barrier to collaborating. Participants noted that these cultural differences manifested in different ways, including language barriers, issues of territoriality around professional roles/identities regarding academic content, divergent views on grading and academic rigor or offering courses, and misconceptions and stereotypes regarding their roles, responsibilities, and expertise within the academic enterprise. This study found that the fundamental elements of the cultural differences seem to stem specifically from non-administrative faculty and student affairs having different definitions of educators' role in facilitating academic success and persistence. Much of the guidance from participants regarding ways to improve partnerships between these groups focused on building sustainable pathways for academic and student affairs practitioners to interact and provide mutually beneficial opportunities to work together to improve communication, trust, and mutual respect regarding expertise. These findings are in alignment with the research conducted by Philpott and Strange (2003) and Sandeen (2004), who found that discussing cultural differences in communication, working norms, and role expectations at the onset of collaboration could assist with constructing and implementing partnership initiatives. Surprisingly, many of the participants noted that, overall, faculty on their campuses were interested in helping improve student persistence through collaboration and acknowledged the specialized expertise of student affairs professionals.

However, they noted the barriers to engaging faculty in collaborations were more complicated due to institutional constraints of time, service releases, and reward structures.

A unique finding of this study is that the cultural complexities between academics and student affairs administrators seemed to be less influential to the development of student persistence collaborations at their campus than was demonstrated in preceding studies (Arcelus, 2008; Engstrom & Tinto, 2000; Perez, 2016). There were a few reasons as to why participants perceived this to be true. First, almost all the academic partners held administrative roles currently or at some point in their careers. Therefore, most of the cultural differences customarily associated with faculty or academic culture were not as apparent when creating these collaborations. Additionally, many of the participants were able to utilize their experiences in prior roles to bridge academic and administrative cultures as conduits and stated that they were selected to be part of these collaborations specifically based on those traits. Secondly, collaboration may appear more seamless for these participants due to their strong commitment to a common purpose around student success that aligns with the principles of the Jesuit mission. Research conducted by Arcelus (2008) also found that an embodied institutional mission helps reduce academic and administrative differences to produce student success partnerships. Participants also embraced professional identities and subcultural norms to create clear roles within the collaborations. Participants did not perceive that there was a need to deconstruct the subcultures; instead, they owned their differing perspectives and expertise to address concerns about student persistence from different angles. Participants noted that this was unique to these partnerships as there was an established trust, common purpose, and respect among participants grounded in the Jesuit mission. Based on these factors, the cultural divide of academic versus administrator was not as prominent within these partnerships as in other studies on this topic.

Structural complexities. This study utilized the structural framework to provide a theoretical lens in order to understand the social architecture and structural dynamics within an organization. My findings suggest that the ways in which the institution is organized factors into the success of student persistence collaborations, as structural influences can enhance or constrain what collaboration can accomplish (Birnbaum, 1988).

Although the study was not designed to investigate the campuses as individual case studies, I found that participants from the same sites generally had similar perceptions regarding what structural elements most significantly influenced their collaborations. Most frequently referenced were resources, campus size, loose coupling of campus divisions, institutional transitions, leadership support, and reporting hierarchies. Many of the negative perceptions of structural complexities on collaborations revolved around misalignment of resources and rewards, incongruent reporting hierarchies, and ineffective accountability structures. Alternatively, positive perceptions were correlated to the institution's size as being small and intimate, support from leadership regarding collaborative practices, centralized reporting structures through a provost model, universal accountability models that create a shared responsibility for student persistence outcomes, and appropriate allocation of resources and personnel. Findings that examine loose coupling and institutional transitions were more nuanced. Loose coupling reinforced decentralization of policies and procedures within divisions that lead to inconsistencies in practices, but also provided the infrastructure to support respecting roles and responsibilities among collaborators. Similarly, institutional transitions had both positive and negative effects on collaborations depending on the circumstances. For many institutions, transitions allowed for new leadership who prioritized collaboration and retention initiatives. Conversely, participants noted that transition could make collaborating more difficult if essential personnel involved in the partnership leave. Expectantly, these findings reinforce existing

literature on the structural factors influencing collaborations, specifically as they relate to small, private, and religiously affiliated institutions (Birnbaum, 1988; Del Favero & Bray, 2005; Harper & Jackson, 2011; Kezar & Lester, 2009).

The data collected also support the findings of prior research by Gibson and Dribble (2008) and Schein (2010), which suggests that these student persistence collaborations were unto themselves forms of loosely coupled structures, as they do not embed in a single organizational context, but rather represented cross-organizational cooperation through a common purpose. Participants corroborated that the benefits of such a system were numerous, as it provided opportunities for cross-unit information sharing, shared communications, and the potential reduction of redundancy around student persistence initiatives. Creating these collaborations made it possible for the campuses to develop subsystems that responded uniquely and adaptively to the goals regarding student persistence.

Individual Characteristics

This study found that all participants used individual characteristics (personal attributes or qualities of collaborators) as a pivotal way to define and describe why their partnerships were successful. From the collected data, a pattern developed where three interpersonal attributes of collaborators were deemed crucial to building a sustainable partnership: cultivating respect and trust, being a collaborative champion, and valuing dialogue and compromise within the partnership.

Apparent from the data is the realization that trusting and respectful relationships are the foundation of successful collaboration; however, this takes time, patience, perseverance, and acceptance of longstanding professional differences to build. Participants noted that taking time to learn about their counterparts' expertise allowed them to develop interpersonal bonds across different cultural or professional divisions. Fostering trust and mutual respect of expertise is vital

in order to reduce potential professional territoriality and hostility. This finding reinforces higher education collaboration literature, including research by J. Cook and Lewis (2007), Kezar and Lester (2009), Kinzie and Kuh (2004), and Perez (2016), all of whom identified trust and mutual respect of expertise as the key social conditions necessary to facilitate collaborative practice.

In alignment with Kezar and Lester's (2009) research, participants noted that outside of having a mutual interest in student success, trust in each other helped to bond the group and was invaluable in sustaining the coalition when there were few other tangible incentives. One finding that was unique to this study was the value participants placed on using compassion for each other as a strategy for building trust and mutual respect. Compassion directly relates to members' ability to be in alignment with the Jesuit and Ignatian approach to navigating tension and challenging situations, and therefore may be a distinctive characteristic of successful collaborations in Jesuit universities.

Participants spoke about the importance of having collaborative champions as members of the partnership due to their institutional and interpersonal capital. The tactic of involving strong networkers in these collaborations reinforces findings from prior research. For example, Kezar and Lester (2009) found that individuals with high levels of collaborative capital and competencies were essential to building successful coalitions due to their ability to navigate institutional dynamics and create campus buy-in for the aims of the partnership. This finding also aligns with the first stage of longstanding collaboration development models created by Arino et al. (2005), Kanter (1996), Mohrman et al. (1995), and Ring and Van de Ven (1994). Stage one focuses on designated members of the partnership building commitment within the institution by convincing stakeholders of the importance of collaborative work.

Additionally, this study found that collaborative champions were able to communicate more seamlessly between academic and student affairs subcultures and used this skill act as a

conduit to bridge disparate stakeholders through collaborative practices. Similarly, to studies done by Kezar and Lester (2009) and Perez (2016), this study found that collaborative champions tended to be longtime members of the community who had already developed extensive social networks that could be leveraged to make the collaboration more successful. A unique finding of the study is that many of the participants who identified as collaborative champions felt intimately connected to the other division based on having professional experience in that area. These participants noted that having exposure to different professional areas helped them navigate alternative perspectives more seamlessly and enhanced their ability to be collaborative champions. This finding is especially interesting for educational practice, as it provides evidence for creating avenues for cross-training and professional rotation programs to expand expertise and collaborative competencies.

Finally, this study found that individuals who cultivated and engaged in dialogue were essential to the success of student persistence collaborations. Participants placed a high value on individuals who were able to work through contentious topics through transparent conversations and progressing to a solution or compromise. This finding augments research by J. Cook and Lewis (2007), Kuh (2005), and Sandeen (2004), who found that deficiencies in communication and a lack of ability to engage in dialogue between academic and student affairs regarding initiatives was a key factor of creating successful collaborations. Additionally, Arcelus (2008) found that meaningful, interconnected relationships that encourage dialogue—as well as space for discord—regarding shared goals, values, and institutional mission help foster collaborative environments. This finding reinforces the importance of creating time and space for collective dialogue within collaborations and having skilled conveners who can help the group navigate challenging conversations.

External Factors

As the theoretical framework for this study explained, higher education institutions are open systems, and therefore interact with external factors that may affect organizational or individual dynamics. The study found that participants perceive that the most influential external factors on student persistence collaborations were threefold. First, changes in the types of students attending Jesuit institutions regarding their demographics, academic, emotional and financial support needs create an increased workload in order for collaborators to retain students. It is important to note that the rise of students attending higher education with more complex academic and wellness concerns is a national and international trend. Based on studies conducted by the Center for Collegiate Mental Health (2018) and the UCLA Higher Education Research Institute (Eagan et al., 2017), in the last few years there has been a significant increase in the number of traditionally aged college students (18-24) who are dealing with mental health problems ranging from depression and anxiety to more serious psychiatric disorders. However, participants in my study felt this increase might be more dramatic at Jesuit institutions based on high need students selecting to come to their institutions due to their promoted close-touch practices, which are a byproduct of their mission of whole student success.

This finding was somewhat unanticipated but does make sense based on persistence literature. Very little higher education collaboration research specifically discusses the increases in student complexities (academic and emotional) as an external factor for consideration. Instead, studies such as the one conducted by Kezar and Lester (2009) rank the most significant external pressures impacting collaboration coming from ranking and accrediting bodies, granting agencies, and state and federal governments. Alternatively, most persistence research focuses on student complexities increasing as a substantial factor influencing student retention (Tinto, 2004). Therefore, this study presents insights to illuminate the intersection of persistence

research and collaboration literature to address a new phenomenon affecting persistence collaborations within higher education.

Secondly, participants perceive that selected board members without orientation or commitment to the Jesuit values and mission could have a negative influence on collaborations. As board members have considerable influence on organizational decisions, if there is a misalignment between the mission and members' values and goals, it can significantly impact daily practices. Finally, participants noted that with increasing federal compliances—linked to funding and accreditation—their institutions had to shift to a more collaborative model to accommodate meeting the parameters of new regulations. Many participants vocalized that additional compliance requirements—without additional resources—put a strain on collaborators' ability to do their work.

An unexpected finding is that participants did not view national rankings as highly influential on student persistence collaborations. The majority of participants noted that internal or mission-oriented motivations were more influential than moving up in national or regional rankings. This finding might be unique to the institutions studied based on their regional and master's-level Carnegie classifications. However, participants were able to note that although the believed rankings were not a primary factor influencing collaborations, they still generally acknowledged the perceived importance of high persistence rates for the admission/yield process for new students.

The study met its aims by identifying the organizational, individual, and external factors that stakeholders believed were most influential to cross-divisional collaborations for student persistence within the Jesuit context. The next section discusses the primary findings regarding the unique characteristics of examined collaborations, including their structures, processes, purposes, and methods of evaluation.

Structures, Processes, Purposes, and Evaluations

A goal of this study was to produce data on the developmental dynamics of collaborations within higher education, as most current research on collaboration does not fully address this topic (Kezar & Lester, 2009). This study found that across the six campuses, there were four general configurations of student persistence collaborations between academic and student affairs: university retention committees, student success intervention teams, first-year programming, and student success initiatives/persistence special projects. Although the structures, processes, aims, and configurations varied by partnership and campus, participants noted a few common themes: (a) common purpose of the collaboration, (b) the value of having cross-sectionalism of members, (c) utilization of data and systems, (d) diverse representation, and (e) skilled conveners in leadership roles. Additionally, participants perceived that their collaborations moved through commonly established developmental stages of forming, storming, norming, performing, and transforming (Bailey & Koney, 2000; Tuckman, 1965). Utilizing these strategies allows collaborations to establish formalized processes and identify potential improvements to their collaborations.

A focus of this study was to investigate the methods of assessment stakeholders use to evaluate the effectiveness of their collaborations. Currently, there is sparse empirical research regarding the evaluation of collaborations, as most higher education institutions do not systematically measure these interactions (Kezar & Lester, 2009; Whitt et al., 2008). This study found that although collaborators may not measure their success systematically or based on universal benchmarks, they do have methods of defining and identifying success based on established internal metrics. This includes the level of campus interaction and buy-in to the collaboration, internal goals for student persistence rates, leadership validation, individual student successes, and reflective retreats. Also, there was a consensus that measuring

improvement in student persistence is complicated due to the many factors and variables involved.

The study found two unique ways collaborators evaluate the success of the collaboration. The first was the partnership's ability to develop around a common purpose and mission to create a defined collaborative unit working towards implementing institution priorities regarding student persistence. The second was how these stakeholders evaluated the goals/ successes of student persistence collaborations as not to just retain students but to help navigate them to other places if the institution did not meet their needs. This was done based on an aligned with Jesuit practices of discernment and cura personalis and may be a practice more unique to collaborations within the Jesuit context.

Summary of Contributions to Literature and Theory

This study contributes to existing literature in three areas. First, findings that illuminate factors and characteristics that support or inhibit partnerships enhance the current higher education collaboration research and provide new and augmented insights that are critical for stakeholders and campus communities seeking to develop successful collaborations. These findings also help researchers better understand how academic and student affairs officers at Jesuit universities define and evaluate the success of cross-divisional student persistence collaborations. The findings also provide context about the structure, processes, and purposes that create the infrastructure for these unique partnerships. Second, the findings contribute to Jesuit higher education literature by providing context on how these collaborations are uniquely developed and sustained using distinctive approaches that are grounded in the Jesuit mission and Ignatian principles. Third, the findings add to student persistence research as it reinforces the importance of having academic and student affairs collaborations, which allow campuses to appropriately aggregate expertise to make meaningful improvements to student success

outcomes. Additionally, this study corroborates existing persistence studies that speak to changes in student needs and their impact on campus collaborations.

In addition to contributions to the literature, this study offers more in-depth insight into several theoretical perspectives grounded in the organizational theory from which I drew to develop the framework for this study. Regarding organizational culture, the findings of this study fortify research that speaks to the strength of a lived and embodied mission. The structural framework supports the findings and provides new insights into the distinctive structural complexities influencing collaborations within Jesuit universities. The external factors discovered in this study are unique to student persistence collaboration, and therefore they augment existing research on higher education collaborations. Although the external factors may be unique to this study, they reinforce the theory of open systems to describe universities as operating in constant interchange with their environment and have many complex interactions and interrelationships within their boundaries (Birnbaum, 1988). Also, the study promotes the concept that organizations functioning as an open system require careful leadership and strong institutional missions to balance internal needs and adapt to environmental circumstances (Morgan, 2006).

Developing collaborative relationships in support of student success means institutions must devote time and resources to create new structures, practices, and policies that support these engagements. The findings from this study lead to a set of implications for both practice and research within the field of Jesuit higher education, as well as potential implications for higher education more broadly. The next two sections discuss the implications for educational leadership and practice.

Implications for Educational Leadership

As discussed by Kezar and Lester (2009), leaders seeking to enhance collaborative practices on their campuses need to understand what types of collaborations would be most advantageous, the factors needed to support and enact collaborative engagement, and the systematic barriers to creating partnerships. Therefore, this study adds to existing organizational theory and leadership literature, as it provides findings that can help higher education leaders better navigate the paradox of collaboration. The goal of the study is to provide a pragmatic guide for Jesuit campus leaders regarding the factors of the organization that potentially need to be altered, implemented, and supported to create a synergistic environment where collaboration can thrive.

The findings of the study suggest that Jesuit campus leaders have significant power and influence over the success of collaborations, as they can be instrumental in developing an organizational infrastructure and culture that systematically supports and encourages partnerships. Therefore, it is crucial that leaders develop mechanisms for engaging appropriate stakeholders in collaborative practices and rewarding them for their service. Participants also spoke of the importance of leadership establishing a common purpose and strategic goals for collaborations campus-wide that is sustained through strategic leadership appointments, communications, resource allocations, time releases, and changes to reward systems. Findings also support the need for leadership to identify, hire, and reward individuals who act as collaborative champions and natural network builders.

Additionally, leadership should remain cognizant of the evolving internal and external pressures and attempt to mitigate negative influences by supporting changes to practice or policies if necessary. Maintaining space for open dialogue and systematic reporting of findings

from the collaboration can ensure leadership is aware of potential barriers to sustaining partnerships. Leadership should also focus on creating purposeful accountability structures for student success collaborations through reporting hierarchies that are centralized. Many participants noted the value of having a provost model where academic and student affairs officers report to the chief academic officer. Collaborations that report to a chief academic officer could help foster engagement from non-administrative faculty in collaborations.

Specifically, for Jesuit leaders, this study found that remaining in alignment with the Jesuit mission and using it as a foundation to build collaborative practices is essential. Therefore, leaders should utilize the foundation of Jesuit and Ignatian principles to engage stakeholders in collaborative practices. Leaders should make time to forge alliances that bring disparate stakeholders together under a common purpose that is in alignment with their strategic priorities and in the service of the mission.

Two findings from this study illuminated the potential disconnect of strategic priorities and alignment with the Jesuit mission. First, maintaining alignment with the mission needs to be considered when leadership is appointing board members. Many of the participants noted that boards with members who align with the school's mission could positively influence student success collaborations, and those that are misaligned with the mission or lacking commitment to the Jesuit educational ideology can be problematic. Second, leaders need to be able to identify topics that the campus may be struggling to actualize and align with the mission. For example, this study found that participants perceived that their leaders were having a difficult time confronting and navigating dialogues about complex topics such as social justice and inequities in student populations on campus, diversity, and gender imbalances. Many participants noted that these concepts are cornerstones of Jesuit ideology and must be addressed when working to

improve student persistence but were being ignored or overlooked by their leadership and thus were affecting the ability to collaborate. Leaders need to guide their campuses through difficult conversations about uncomfortable topics to remove potential barriers to collaboration and ensure campus priorities are fully aligned with their mission.

Finally, modeling collaboration and reiterating its importance in documents, public speeches, and reviews is crucial to creating a campus that cultivates successful collaborations. Leaders interested in creating collaborations to improve student persistence should make it a priority to develop task forces to examine campus values and alignment with collaboration around student success. Task forces and other collaborations reduce top-down directives about student success goals that make people resistant to collaboration (Kezar & Lester, 2009). Especially regarding student persistence collaborations, leaders need to have realistic expectations that stem from the collaborators' views and knowledge.

Implications for Educational Practice

There has been increasing recognition within higher education regarding the value of collaboration among functional areas of academic and student affairs to achieve the organizational mission and enhance effectiveness (Kezar & Lester, 2009). However, even with logic supporting collaborations, research shows implementing and sustaining these partnerships can be difficult based on the organizational and cultural landscape of higher education. Therefore, additional research was not needed to study the significance of collaboration. Instead, this research focused on providing findings that illuminate educational practices to overcome potential barriers and implementable practices to support collaborations to be successful. Based on the results of this study and the current literature, it is imperative that institutions invest in

creating systems of support for those engaged in or desiring to collaborate to improve student persistence in order for them to be successful.

A significant finding of this study is that collaborators felt having dedicated time to work together, dialogue, and reflect on the collaborative process was essential to its evolution, sustainability, and overall success. Considering this finding, a standard educational practice on campuses should be establishing working groups where campus constituents—who already act in collaborative champion roles and those new to the partnership process—can meet regularly to share best practices, problem solve, and develop an infrastructure for collaborations on campus based on common purposes. These types of sessions, retreats, or learning communities can foster a culture where collaboration is supported and sustained. This practice would provide dedicated time to work on collaborations outside of regular job responsibilities and to get academic and student affairs officers into each other's spaces. Also, these sessions enable collaboration to become a visible part of the institutional culture by showcasing different types of partnerships as well as those who engage in relational work and their areas of expertise. These types of sessions could be expanded into a mentorship system to cultivate new collaborative champions and natural networkers across the campus. They could also be a place where campus members could take time to form interpersonal relationships, which is shown to help overcome barriers created by professional subcultures.

All participants noted the importance of using comprehensive systems to collect student persistence data systematically and to document and assess processes. This data is valuable to collaborators as it informs their priorities, processes, and decisions. Additionally, investing in data collection systems can be a method to catalog existing projects related to common purposes. Campuses could then evaluate redundancies and potentially consolidate groups to be most

efficient. As participants noted, having limited time is a key barrier to sustaining collaborations, and that they are a part of multiple collaborative efforts around student success. With the ability to collect streamlined data on collaborations occurring on campus, it is possible that some decentralized projects could centralize through a single partnership. Overall, sharing data would help to reduce departmental silos and encourage cross-divisional collaborations. As the findings illuminate, merely buying or building systems is not enough. Campuses must be mindful and purposeful about new system integration to ensure their success.

One of the key dilemmas participants discussed regarding the structural barriers to developing successful collaborations is overcoming ambiguous or decentralized reporting lines to ensure accountability. As these collaborations can function as their own cross-functional system, not having clear methods for accountability can be detrimental to the outcomes of the partnership. Therefore, campuses should spend time before constructing a cross-functional team to discuss how they can structure accountability mechanisms to ensure collaborative efforts are conducted in the most effective and efficient manner.

Finally, collaborations need support to adapt and evolve with organizational and societal changes. This includes changes to resources, reporting structures, personnel and leadership transitions, external pressures, and changes in student demographics. Campuses need to work to build infrastructure that supports collaborative practices as well as student persistence priorities and can evaluate and monitor their progress. For example, participants noted dramatic changes in the student populations attending Jesuit universities. Specific populations of students who may have traditionally attended Jesuit schools such as regionally located underrepresented and low-income populations are now attending and persisting in fewer numbers. Additionally, more students with increased academic and emotional support needs are entering these campuses. The

implications for these shifts are numerous, and strategies to address concerns regarding these changes must be a priority. Participants suggested that their campuses put more financial resources in the form of scholarships and tuition discounts toward supporting low income and underrepresented populations persist. Hiring additional trained personnel and increasing resources to support student service areas such as counseling centers, academic resource centers, and other wrap-around services should also be a priority practice for Jesuit campuses.

Although this study did address many potential implications for educational leaders and practice, the design of the research limited the scope of findings to the delineated research questions. The next section discusses the limitations of this study and areas for future research.

Limitations of the Study

Although the study has reached its aims, there were some limitations and shortcomings. Using phenomenology as the foundational methodology for this study suggests the importance of understanding the lived experiences of participants as they relate to the essence of the phenomenon of collaboration. Although qualitative methods are most appropriate for phenomenological studies, other types of research methodologies, such as case study or action research, could illuminate a more robust view of the lived experiences of collaborators through observations and project development. The current study used interviews and document analysis at six sites to triangulate findings and create cross-campus analysis. However, the study did not incorporate observations of collaborative engagements across the campuses. This restricts the findings scope to only participants' perceived experiences and information presented through accessible documents. In addition, the researcher was only able to interview 22 collaborators due to time and availability. The data would have been improved by expanding the scope of

participants to allow for the broader inclusion of campus voices that are participating in student persistence collaborations, specifically non-administrative faculty.

A limitation based on the study's methodology is that the findings do not evaluate the impact of these collaborations on student persistence outcomes, nor do they qualify how the organizational and interpersonal factors identified correlate with the success of the collaborations. This study only captures the perceptions of the experiences of key players. In order to provide correlational findings, a qualitative design would need to be employed.

Another shortcoming of this study was the inability to capture the developmental process or life cycle of the collaboration over time. Due to limited time, a longitudinal study was not conducted, and therefore, the findings provide only a snapshot of participants' perceptions and recollections of the collaborative process and its ultimate success. Regarding this limitation, I found that in some cases, participants were at first hesitant to declare the collaboration as entirely successful because their efforts were still evolving. They noted that they could only speak to the current success of the collaborations development. Longitudinal, in-depth work could be useful in better understanding the life cycle of collaborations and organizational change as they relate to developing collaborative culture. Additionally, longitudinal work would allow participants to be interviewed multiple times, which is a best practice of phenomenological research.

Some of the limitations of the study are also strengths. First, this study was intentionally limited to studying academic and student affairs officers participating in student persistence collaborations at Jesuit universities. Although these parameters limit the generalizability of the findings, the benefit of the specificity of the findings is that they provide unique insights to Jesuit stakeholders that have not generated through other types of studies. Second, by not engaging in case study or action research, it was easier to maintain the anonymity of participants and their

work sites. It also provided the ability to collect data at more sites to make the findings more reflective of Jesuit universities as a whole.

Based on the study's limitations and findings, future research is needed to examine potential explanations of unexpected results and areas this study was unable to address. The next section will discuss potential topics and methodology for future research.

Future Research

This study points to three paths for valuable and demiurgic future research that are in direct alignment with the focus of this project. A critical area for future research is a replication of this study across other Jesuit universities. Although I was able to conduct my research using six sites, the organizational, interpersonal, and external factors influencing all 28 Jesuit colleges and universities may vary. Therefore, replicating this study at other Jesuit campuses, including those classified as research-focused and with more significant numbers of graduate programs, could provide valuable insights regarding alignment to the mission, student persistence strategies, and tactics for creating successful collaborations. Also, studies of collaboration involving different university types (other religiously-affiliated and secular institutions) would be of significant value to augmenting researchers' and practitioners' understanding of developing successful collaborations for student persistence.

Second, more extensive research on collaboration from the perspective of all campus stakeholders involved is needed. Studies including a broader cross-section of collaborators—not limited to student and academic affairs officers—would be enlightening. A case study approach would allow for the inclusion of campus voices, such as faculty, staff, leadership, board members, and students who may be involved in or influential to student persistence coalitions.

As mentioned earlier, a longitudinal study would also present findings that would help to better understand the life cycle of collaboration and its impact on organizational changes.

Third, although this study sought to understand how participants perceived certain factors to define and factor into the success of collaborations, it was unable to quantify, correlate, or show causation. Also, the study was not designed to evaluate the impact collaborations had on student persistence outcomes. To accomplish this, future research using quantitative or mixed methods studies could investigate how collaborations could quantify their success and correlate it to student persistence outcomes.

In addition to these three directions for continuing research, a few unanticipated findings from the study should be considered as areas for further research. I will discuss two topics for which I believe future research is imperative. First, research that examines non-administrative faculty's engagement with student persistence efforts is essential to understanding the full picture regarding developing collaborations between academic and student affairs. My research indicates that participants have diverse experiences regarding non-administrative faculty members' attitudes towards involvement with student success collaborations. However, based on participants' examples, five general faculty groups were identified: (a) engaged and personally motivated, (b) over-committed and inconsistently involved due to time and service constraints, (c) unengaged and focused on other work, (d) generally not engaged with university-life, and (e) not on the radar for service engagements due to faculty status. The second group of faculty was most frequently based on participants' lived experiences. Also, participants touched upon organizational constraints (e.g., limited resources to compensate faculty, merit reviews linking to involvement, lack of department-level goals for retention and graduation to incentivize faculty accountability), which limits the involvement of non-administrative faculty.

However, participants strongly felt that faculty play a critical role in shaping the student experience, and felt they were underleveraged as collaborators in student success strategies. Therefore, further research is needed to unravel non-administrative faculty's role in student success collaborations and increasing faculty engagement. Through a case study model, research could investigate ways in which the academy and individual faculty members could engage more fully as collaborators to support institutional efforts to improve student retention and completion. Moreover, seeking the perspectives of university leadership could provide insight into ways the organization could implement new methods of recruiting and retaining a diverse representation of non-administrative faculty on student persistence efforts.

Second, most participants addressed changes in the types of students attending Jesuit universities. Although this was not an anticipated finding, it brings to light a change to Jesuit higher education that is affecting stakeholders' ability to collaborate. Future research should focus on examining changes, patterns, and trends in student demographics and the perceived increase in academic/emotional support needs. Explicitly studying Jesuit campuses may produce unique insights, as participants in this study believed that their campuses were experiencing more dramatic fluxes than what national trends report.

Concluding Thoughts

Studies such as this one is imperative to continuing the discussion regarding ways in which campuses can overcome the organizational, individual, and external complexities to create an environment that values collaborative efforts to increase student persistence. Overall, this study suggests that successful student persistence-focused collaborations between academic and student affairs officers at Jesuit institutions are influenced by organizational, individual, and external factors within their institutional environment. The research also points to the potential

value participants placed on enhancing or reducing these factors as a form of supporting collaborations. Moreover, this study found that participants perceived that how their institution is organized, its interpersonal dynamics, and established cultural norms played a significant role in the success of these collaborations. Participants also perceived a correlation between the collaborative effort's success and the extent to which certain factors were supported and embodied by all campus stakeholders; most significantly, how the institution's Jesuit mission was enacted in daily practices of these partnerships. The uniqueness of these partnerships is threefold, based on: (a) cultivating a distinct student-focused purpose grounded in the Jesuit mission and Ignatian principles, (b) collaboration processes and methods of evaluation of partnerships by participants, and (c) configuration and structure of the collaboration. Despite obstacles to collaboration, participants perceived that they were successful in working together to create and sustain a collaborative network to support student persistence.

This study offers some suggestions for practitioners at Jesuit universities, as well as educators from other types of higher educational institutions who are seeking insight on how to develop successful cross-divisional collaborations for student persistence and success. It must be understood that this study was only conducted with a small group of academic and student affairs participants at selected Jesuit universities over a short time period. The study's limitations make room for continued productive research in several areas addressed in this chapter.

Through this dissertation process, I developed a new appreciation for the multitude of influential variables influx when developing cross-functional partnerships. Although the partnerships involved in this study are not flawless, participants are dedicated to their common purpose of helping students persist, being patient with the collaborative process, and remaining mindful of developing mutual respect and trust among their counterparts. Participants were also

forthcoming about necessary improvements to their partnerships and realistic about the organizational changes and challenges that need to be endured in order to sustain their collaborative practices. They disclosed that while they felt the collaborations were successful in meeting their aims, they would measure the continued success of the collaboration based on the partnerships' ability to evolve and adapt; as the collaboration would inevitably have to face new and changing challenges in the future. Above all else, these participants are champions for their collaborations and saw the inherent value of working together to accomplish a larger goal.

This dissertation project gave me a new perspective on my colleagues across the Jesuit campuses, and the complexities they must navigate to collaborate for student success. I value and appreciate the tremendous insight, experiences, and knowledge they shared so candidly to produce this research. They are indeed men and women for and with others, and their continued motivation to work together to create a seamless learning community where students, faculty, and staff can thrive is inspiring. I hope the results of this study will contribute to the development of future successful cross-divisional partnerships that improve collaborative campus cultures as well as student success outcomes.

Appendices

Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Opening

Thank you for taking the time to speak with me. You have been selected based on your experience working collaboratively with (academic or student affairs) to assist with undergraduate student persistence.

Short Demographic Questions

Before we begin, I'd like to get some background information about your professional background:

1. Which department on campus do you report to?
Academic Affairs
Student Affairs
2. How many years of experience do you have in the academic affairs/student affairs?
(This should only include your professional years)
3. How many years have you worked in this institution?

Defining Collaboration

Next, I would like to ask you about the SA-AA collaboration(s) you are currently working on.

1. In what ways do you collaborate or partner with SA or AA to improve UG retention and persistence?
2. Tell me about your role in AA-SA collaboration(s) that you have been involved with regarding UG persistence at your institution? (ask about specific one if this has been addressed)
3. Why were these collaboration(s) established? How were they developed/construction/implemented it?
4. Where/who provides leadership or oversight for the collaboration? Why is the case?
5. In what ways has the structure been effective/ ineffective? Example?
6. What are the goals/ purposes of the collaboration? In what ways does the collaboration achieve its goals? In what ways does it fall short? How do you know?

7. How could the collaboration you are a part of be improved?
8. What factors are important for sustaining this collaboration? What challenges does it face? As you look into the future of your institution, do you see this type of collaboration maintaining? Why or why not?

Experience Questions

Next, I would like to discuss your experiences working collaboratively or building these collaborative partnerships with (SA or AA) regarding student persistence initiatives at your institution more broadly.

1. How would you define a successful intra-organizational collaboration in support of student success?
2. How are SA and AA collaborations focused on student persistence different from other campus collaborations you might be involved in? Could you provide an example?
3. Research points to different organizational cultures/ professional norms or values/ identities in academic affairs and student affairs that impact their ability to collaborate. What are your thoughts about these differences? Are there similarities?
4. What were your perceptions or assumptions about working with student affairs/academic affairs on this collaboration? How have these changed?
5. As a professional in (AA or SA), do you see differences in how you approach collaborations for student success than those in (SA or AA)?
 - a) In what ways do you believe these differences impact the success of collaborations?
6. How have you and your teams overcome these differences to produce outcomes?
7. What organizational or institutional factors help support collaboration between academic affairs and student affairs professionals at your institution?
8. Can you provide examples or a story about when organizational barriers (internal or external) have hindered the ability for SA and AA to collaborate?
9. In what ways have the outcomes and impacts of the collaboration been assessed, and by whom? What did those assessments say about the collaboration and its effectiveness?
10. What guidance or advice would you give to other academic or student affairs professionals (or institutions) looking to develop successful collaborations focused on student persistence? Why?

Influence of Jesuit Mission

1. What aspects of the Jesuit mission are most influential or prevailing at your institution?
2. How do those aspects of Jesuit mission influence how academic and student affairs collaboration for student persistence? Can you provide a story or example?
3. How are Jesuit values explicitly stated or incorporated in the (mission statement, content, outcomes, strategic plan) for the SA-AA collaborations you are a part of? How is it used or embedded?
4. How is the Jesuit mission actualized in the daily practices of the SA-AA collaborations you are a part of?
5. Was there a time the mission was ignored or not taken into account when a decision was made in the collaborative process?

Closing

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this study. Do you recommend any other (academic or student affairs officers) at your institution to get a complete picture of the experiences with these collaborations?

Appendix B: Recruitment Email

Dear Colleague,

I am an Assistant Dean at the Bellarmine College of Liberal Arts at Loyola Marymount University, and a doctoral student in UCLA's Ed.D. in Educational Leadership. The goal of my doctoral research is to add to knowledge about collaborations among student affairs and academic affairs within the Jesuit higher education context. Broadly, my dissertation examines partnerships/collaborative initiatives between student affairs and academic affairs at Jesuit institutions to impact undergraduate retention and persistence.

Specifically, my study will explore:

- how actors define successful collaborative retention efforts and how are such collaborations different from other types of collaborations,
- the conditions that support or hinder the development of these collaborations, and
- how Jesuit mission relates to distinctive approaches for creating collaboration

As part of my study, I will interview student affairs and academic affairs professionals at Jesuit institutions (all to remain unidentifiable) who work on these types of collaborations. I am in the process of recruiting participants for my study and would like to speak with you regarding your eligibility. To participate in this study, you must have working knowledge of active student and academic affairs collaborations focused on undergraduate retention and persistence. Please let me know if you would be willing to set up a time to speak about participating in my research. Thank you for your consideration and I look forward to hearing from you.

Best,

Emily

Phone: [REDACTED] / Email: [REDACTED]

Appendix C: Study Information Sheet/ Participant Consent Form

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA LOS ANGELES STUDY INFORMATION SHEET

Academic and Student Affairs Collaboration to Impact Undergraduate Persistence in the Jesuit University Context: A Phenomenological Study

Emily Schlam, Candidate for Doctorate of Education and Robert Rhoads, PhD, Faculty Sponsor from the Department of Education & Information Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) are conducting a research study.

You were selected as a possible participant in this study because of your knowledge of academic and student affairs collaboration for undergraduate student retention and persistence at U.S. Jesuit Colleges and Universities. Your participation in this research study is voluntary.

Why is this study being done?

This study designed to add to knowledge about how intra-organizational collaborations are developed, implemented, and sustained among student affairs and academic affairs within the Jesuit higher education context, specifically the work seeking to impact undergraduate student persistence. This is a qualitative study, exploring the experiences of individuals who have been involved in these types of collaborations to examine:

- how actors define successful collaborative retention efforts and how are such collaborations different from other types of collaborations,
- the conditions that support or hinder the development of these collaborations, and
- how Jesuit mission relates to distinctive approaches for creating collaboration

What will happen if I take part in this research study?

If you volunteer to participate in this study, the researcher will ask you to do the following:

- Participant in one 60-minute interview regarding your experience with academic and student affairs collaboration focused on undergraduate student success at Jesuit College of Universities.
- All interview questions revolve around your experience with these types of collaborations.
- Interviews can take place in-person, video conference, or phone.

How long will I be in the research study?

Participation will take a total of about 60 minutes.

Are there any potential risks or discomforts that I can expect from this study?

- There are no anticipated risks or discomforts expected from this study.

- All participants and their affiliated work sites will remain confidential throughout the study.

Are there any potential benefits if I participate?

You will not directly benefit from your participation in the research. However, you may benefit from the study as this information may be helpful to your work with these types of campus collaborations.

The results of the study may begin to address the gap in current research by providing empirical data on how academic and student affairs stakeholders experience the processes of collaboration around student retention initiatives. This may help researchers and practitioners know more about what institutions need to do to foster cross-functional collaborations individually and organizationally.

Will information about me and my participation be kept confidential?

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can identify you will remain confidential. It will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. All participants' institutions' identities will remain confidential as well. Any documents used as part of the analysis will come from open access sites and information that can identify an institution will not be used. This study may use documents that include relevant information to the existing partnership initiatives at Jesuit institutions. Participant and work affiliation anonymity will be maintained by using pseudonyms. Interviewees will not be required to sign consent form to maintain confidentiality. Any data files that contain names will be stored on a password protected external hard drive, and then deleted once the transcripts have been transcribed and coded.

What are my rights if I take part in this study?

- You can choose whether or not you want to be in this study, and you may withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time.
- Whatever decision you make, there will be no penalty to you, and no loss of benefits to which you were otherwise entitled.
- You may refuse to answer any questions that you do not want to answer and still remain in the study.

Who can I contact if I have questions about this study?

- **The research team:**

If you have any questions, comments or concerns about the research, you can talk to the one of the researchers. Please contact:

Primary Investigator: Emily Schlam, [REDACTED], ([REDACTED])
Faculty Sponsor: Robert Rhoads, PhD, [REDACTED]

- **UCLA Office of the Human Research Protection Program (OHRPP):**

If you have questions about your rights as a research subject, or you have concerns or suggestions and you want to talk to someone other than the researchers, you may contact the UCLA OHRPP by phone: (310) 206-2040; by email: participants@research.ucla.edu or by mail: Box 951406, Los Angeles, CA 90095-1406.

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